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# STUDIES IN COMPOSITION.

A TEXT-BOOK FOR ADVANCED CLASSES.

BY

DAVID PRYDE, M.A.,

HEAD-MASTER OF THE EDINBURGH MERCHANT COMPANY'S EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION FOR YOUNG LADIES; LECTURER ON ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE SCHOOL OF ARTS; AND AUTHOR OF BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINES OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, ETC.



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## PREFACE.

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THIS text-book is intended for pupils who have mastered the ordinary rules of Grammar and Composition.

It starts from the great principle that correct thinking is the more important part of Composition ; that a correct idea is the source of all true excellence in style ; and that, therefore, accuracy of thought should always be studied along with accuracy of expression.

Accordingly, the chief parts of the work are devoted to *Observation* and *Reading*, the two great sources of our knowledge ; and a course of Exercises is prescribed which trains the student, in the first place, to draw correct ideas from what he observes and reads ; and, in the second place, to express these ideas with the greatest effect.

But, in treating a subject, the pupil is often at a loss where to begin, in what order to take up the details, and where to end ; and after his essay is completed he feels that he has failed to express his ideas fully, and that his style sadly wants both elegance and graphic force. Therefore two chapters are introduced, the one on *Method* and the other on *Style*, the former preceding those on

*Observation* and *Reading*, and the latter coming after them.

When the pupils are advanced, it is a mistake to make them plod through mere routine work without illustrating the nature and utility of what they do. They have become rational beings, and they ought to know the *reason* of every one of their tasks. Accordingly, in this book their attention is very much called to the *theory* of Composition and Literature. In the different chapters they learn the laws of literary method, the natural and simple way of describing any object of observation, the mode of extracting the substance of our reading without adopting the words or even many of the details, and the great movements by which an author attains excellence in style. This information they are expected to master thoroughly.

The efficiency of this system has been thoroughly tested. It has been taught for several years to students of both sexes with very satisfactory results. The pupils, it has been found, take a lively interest both in what they see during their everyday life and in what they read; they acquire the habit of forming distinct and connected opinions about people, things, and books; and when writing, even although it is only a letter, they can convey a clear and forcible idea of a subject.

D. P.

EDINBURGH, *September* 1871.

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# STUDIES IN COMPOSITION.



## INTRODUCTION.

THERE are many valuable treatises on English Composition. The humbler text-books point out the different parts of a sentence, teach the art of combining them, and prescribe numerous exercises to the pupil. The more advanced works, such as those by Blair, Campbell, and Whately, descant upon the higher graces of style with great clearness and fulness. Both classes of books, if studied carefully, will be of service to the student. They will make him a critic; and when he writes they will enable him to lop off the superfluities of his sentences.

But, at the same time, they aid him very little in the actual work of composition.\* He soon

\* Even Cicero admits that his treatise on Rhetoric was of no practical use in forming an orator.

finds himself in a state of perplexity. "I am told," he says, "that my style should have perspicuity, precision, and harmony; but how can I acquire these literary beauties? The style is suggested by the thoughts before I am aware; and when a sentence has once been formed, I find it almost impossible to alter it without affecting the meaning."

The fact is, that these able writers on rhetoric overlook the real source of all the graces of language. While they enlarge upon the expression, they almost entirely neglect the thought. While they give numberless rules for the formation of style, they give absolutely no rules for the formation of ideas. The language is everything; the matter conveyed by the language is nothing. In other words, the books on composition omit the half, and the most important half, of their subject.

The prevalence of this partial view of composition has done great injury to our literature. If we study closely the books of the present day, we shall discover that accuracy of thought is the thing about which authors are most careless. Some may be slovenly about their style; others, again, may elaborate it with the most ambitious figures of speech: but both of these classes agree in neglecting to test and correct their ideas. It never occurs to them, that they should make the study of the realities which they attempt to describe a

matter of conscience, and that they should be anxious to write the truth and nothing but the truth. And what is the result of this neglect? It is no exaggeration to say that from this cause spring all the great evils that infest literature. Some authors catch only a confused glimpse of an idea; and their language becomes obscure and inelegant. Others, though looking keenly enough, see only one side of a subject; and they produce one-sided representations of reality—such as, bigoted pamphlets, or sensational tales, or spasmodic poems. And many never see an idea at all; but write down the vapourings of their own brain in the form of nonsense, affectation, rhapsody, or what is vulgarly called twaddle.

Nor is this want of literary truthfulness limited to inferior authors. It was a characteristic of such a great genius as Shelley. "He was," says Mr Hogg, his intimate friend, "altogether incapable of rendering an account of any transaction whatever, according to the strict and precise truth, and the bare naked realities of actual life."

This neglect of ideas has become so common, that certain authors have openly vindicated it. We open a volume of essays written by a well-known poet, and we find the following passage:—"In every work of art the style is even of more importance than the thought. . . . Thought is mine, yours, everybody's; an artist works with our thoughts as a sculptor works with clay." What a



false theory of literary art! "Thought is mine, yours, everybody's;" that is, the thoughts of all men are alike,—they are utterly commonplace,—we cannot light upon any new idea,—we have exhausted the outer world of matter and the inner world of mind! "An artist works with our thoughts as a sculptor works with clay!" In other words, our thoughts are like dead clay—they have no form or life of their own—they can be twisted and perverted into any shape we please. After reading such a theory, we need not wonder at the abortions in the shape of metaphors, and the convulsions in the shape of sentiments, that are found in certain authors of the present day.

The same carelessness about ideas prevails among students of composition. They seldom feel the necessity of placing themselves face to face with the living subject, and studying intently every feature. Any facts, from whatever source they may come, are thankfully seized, and without any compunction appropriated. This is especially the case in descriptions of natural scenes. A young lady, in an account of a walk which she took in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, represented larks as sitting upon the trees, nightingales as soaring in the air, and canaries as flitting about in every direction.

Now, if we consider the matter attentively, we shall see that the idea is to the expression what the soul is to the body. The expression was made

for the idea, and not the idea for the expression. It is the idea that gives to the expression all its life, pith, and beauty. The expression is only excellent when it suits the idea. For example, clearness and conciseness of style are not always meritorious. Their merit depends altogether upon the thoughts which they express; and in certain cases, which might easily be adduced, they would be absolute blemishes. Accordingly, in composition the idea demands the greater part of our attention. If that demand is not obeyed, if our regard is withdrawn to the words, then we fall into incorrectness or absurdity. Take, as an instance of this truth, the two accounts which Dr Johnson gave of an incident which befell him in his journey to the Hebrides. When he was describing it in an easy way in a letter to a friend, he thought only of the ideas, and he touched off the following simple and vivid sketch :—" A dirty fellow bounced out of the bed on which one of us was to lie." But when he sat down to compose a more ambitious description for the public at large, his attention was mainly given to the expression, and he produced the following pompous and absurd sentence :—" Out of one of the beds on which we were to repose, started up, at our entrance, a man black as a Cyclops from the forge."\*

\* In all circumstances, in every branch of knowledge as well as in composition, the idea and the expression are inseparable. They should never be disjoined by the student;

Acting on these considerations, we should, at the very outset of a course of Composition, impress upon the learner this fact, that the great end of writing is, not to produce fine words, but to express accurate ideas,—not to strike the fancy with ingenious metaphors, but to benefit the mind with representations of reality,—not to imitate slavishly the style of eminent authors, but to copy faithfully the different phases of nature. And on the occasion of every mistake, we should inculcate the same lesson again and again. We should hold up accuracy of ideas as the very essence of all literary merit, as the one thing indispensable, as the quality without which a writer will fall into misrepresentation and absurdity. We should even ask him to imitate such a writer as old Barbour, who, in beginning his great subject, utters this prayer regarding it:—

“Now God gyff grace that I may swa  
Tret it, and bryng it till endyng,  
That I may say nocht but suthfast thing!”

But here an objector may interpose by saying that it is the duty of the other branches of knowledge to give us correct ideas. That is true only

for just as an expression can never be correct unless it springs from a definite idea, so an idea can never be fully developed unless it is formed into a distinct expression. If this fact were kept in view, the study of any subject whatever would become at the same time a study in composition.

in a limited sense. The composer draws many of his facts directly from reality, such as descriptions of persons, places, and incidents. Besides, before he uses any facts, coming from any source whatever, he is bound to test their truth. It is he also who gives to ideas their fullest development; for it is well known that we can never see a thought in its complete distinctness until we try to express it.

Another objection may also be urged. Our opponent may declare that such a system will make the scholar prosaic and commonplace; and he may quote Cicero, who says, "I wish fecundity in a young man to give itself full scope;"\* and Quintilian, who, speaking of the compositions of boyhood, exclaims, "Let that age be daring and invent much, and delight itself in what it invents."† But fecundity and invention, it is well known, can only work with the images of real objects; and unless these images are accurate, the boldest fabrications will be mere absurd rhapsodies.

We come now to the point where we are met by the great question: In what way should composition be studied so as to cultivate this accuracy of idea? The answer is not difficult. The learner must not divorce the study of words and the study of thoughts. While he attends to the formation of

\* De Oratore, ii. 21.

† Institutes, book ii. chapter 4.

the expression, he must attend at the same time to the formation of the ideas. While he cultivates the faculty which gives him language, he must also cultivate those two faculties that give him thoughts, namely, the power of observing and the power of reading. In other words, he must go through two courses of composition exercises—the one training him to observe accurately, and the other training him to read accurately.

These two, then—observation and reading—must always be considered the main subjects of study in composition. But they are not all-sufficient. There must be two subsidiary studies, one going before and the other coming after.

In the first place, there must be a *previous* study. When a student is set face to face with a natural object, he is apt to become bewildered. The features are so numerous and so involved that he knows not where to begin and where to end, what to take in and what to leave out; and he is generally driven to plunge headlong among the details, and to seize whatever comes first to hand. He must therefore acquire the power of grasping the outline or framework of any subject whatever, and of disposing the materials in an intelligible order. He must, in other words, master the great natural laws of *Literary Method*.

In the second place, there must be a *subsequent* study. Even after the student has been thoroughly trained to observe and reflect correctly, he will

often feel a great want in his composition. He will frequently come upon a delicate thought which ordinary language will fail to express, or a series of details which a simple straightforward treatment will be unable to make interesting. He must therefore acquire an easy command of those graphic words, and those magical devices, by which the great authors of our language have wrought their mighty effects. He must, in fact, study *Literary Style*.

Accordingly, the great subjects to which the student must direct his attention are four:—

METHOD,  
OBSERVATION,  
READING,  
STYLE.

## CHAPTER I.

### METHOD.

Method a Necessity—Founded on Law of Association—Three  
Kinds of Method—Narrative—Circumstantial—Picturesque—  
Mixed Method—Advantages.

IN the sunny climes of the Pacific the coral insects have built up a solitary island ; and the sea-weeds, cast upon it by the waves, have mouldered down into a soil, which in a deep layer covers the bare rock. The showers fall upon it ; the zephyrs play over it ; and the summer sun mantles it with his resplendent beams. But the rich soil, the rain-drops, the balmy air, and the golden sunshine are utterly useless, until some living seed, wafted by the winds, falls upon the island. Then this living seed lays hold of the detached elements, assimilates them, and builds them up into a flourishing tree, which can be transplanted to another place, and which will last for many years.

So is it in the world of literature. The objects which we perceive in our everyday life, and the ideas which we find in books, are useless in them-

selves. The quickening thought of the student must fall among them and collect them, and embody them, and form them into a living whole, which can be taken into the mind, and kept there as long as consciousness lasts. It is this power of bringing scattered facts into unity, which is, as Coleridge remarks,\* one of the signs of superior intellect.

In other words, knowledge was never meant to exist in detached fragments. It was never intended to remain shut up within the boards of note-books, handy guides, dictionaries, and encyclopædias. Nor was it designed to be tossed bit by bit into dark and confused minds. The details of knowledge were undoubtedly made to be taken into the mind in an orderly form, and thus to become part of its very substance, and to remain there ready to be used whenever they may be needed. That is to say, they were intended to be classified in such a manner that they could be easily retained by the memory, and easily recalled whenever required.

How to arrange the different *sections* or *chapters* of a subject is comparatively easy, for they are few and are remembered without much trouble. A much more puzzling task it is, to deal with the clusters of ideas that arise in the mind when a subject is contemplated. An inexperienced writer, when he finds himself dropped into such a maze of thoughts, becomes bewildered with the multi-

\* Table Talk, vol. ii.



farious details on every side of him. Instead of controlling them and trying to marshal them into order, he wanders among them, describing each object as he chances to stumble upon it. And when he is compelled by the laws of space or time to stop, the result is most unsatisfactory. He knows not where he began and where he has ended, what he has taken in and what he has left out.

Is there no natural and easy method of arranging ideas by which such chaotic confusion may be avoided? Is there no way by which a work may be

“Led by some rule that guides but not constrains,  
And finished more through happiness than pains?”

In the domain of Physics there is a power called *the attraction of cohesion*, by which two or more particles, when brought together, unite to form a complete body. What a blessing it would be if there was such an attraction among ideas! Then the details of a subject, when manipulated by the mind, would resolve themselves into groups; and the different members of a group would be so firmly knit together in the memory, that, if one were recalled, it would bring all the others along with it.

Most fortunately there is such an attraction among ideas,\* and it is called by metaphysicians

\* Under the term *Ideas* in this chapter is comprised not only thoughts but feelings.

the Law of Association. It is one of the great characteristics of man. Without it man could have no Past, and, having no Past, he could not be said to have any Future; and he would, therefore, like the inferior animals, be confined to the narrow foothold of the Present. Under its influence, all the thoughts that have really been taken into the mind unconsciously form themselves into various clusters, which remain for evermore in the memory. Many of them may seem to be utterly lost; through a long course of years they may never be recalled; but they are merely latent. Let the mind but stumble on one of the members of one of these clusters, and immediately the whole cluster, full and distinct, appears. The effect is often magical. A man is trudging along the dull streets on a drizzly morning, with his attention engrossed with his own disagreeable sensations, when suddenly a casual circumstance completely shuts out the dismal scene. He catches a glimpse of an old college companion, and in an instant he finds himself a student, sitting in a class-room, surrounded by rows of bright youthful faces, and living in an atmosphere which seems charged with health, animal spirits, and literary enthusiasm. Or perhaps a street organ strikes up a certain tune, and immediately he is transported to a distant country town, and is looking out of a window, and humming those very notes, as he watches the sweet approach of the summer evening. Or it may chance that he

buys a nosegay and smells it, and without the loss of a second he feels himself in a sunny garden, surrounded by old trees and quaint dial-stones, treading the velvety turf, basking in the radiance of unnumbered beds of flowers, and inhaling into his very soul the mingled fragrance of rose and sweetbrier.

Regarding the laws of association philosophers are essentially agreed. There is only one point of dispute, namely, whether certain of these laws should be considered distinct principles or merely different modes of one great principle.\* This is not a fit occasion for discussing such a question, nor is such a discussion at all necessary. For *purely practical purposes* it will be enough if we classify the associating laws as those of Contiguity, Similarity, and Cause and Effect.† In other words, we say that there are three kinds of ideas that have a tendency to cohere: 1. Those that have been together before; 2. Those that are like each other; and, 3. Those that stand to each other in

\* Sir Wm. Hamilton, in his *Metaphysics*, lecture xxxi., resolves all the laws of association into the principle of *Redintegration*, "according to which thoughts or mental activities, having once formed parts of the same total thought or mental activity, tend ever after immediately to suggest each other."

† *Contrast* might have been mentioned as another law; but Contrast is included under Contiguity. An idea always implies its opposite: they are *contiguous* to each other in thought.

the relation of cause and effect. Let us illustrate our meaning by examples.

1. Ideas that have been *contiguous* or near each other have a tendency to cluster together. Like people who have companions and have accommodated themselves to each other's peculiarities, they cannot remain apart. An instance of this is given in Mr Carlyle's *Essay on Count Cagliostro*.\* The only incident that is known regarding the infancy of this prince of quacks, is the fact that he was born at Palermo in 1743. But that bare fact brings along with it into the biographer's mind several circumstances connected with childhood. He, therefore, refers to the infantine ills which the embryo impostor must have suffered, to "his teething and swaddling adventures," to "his scaldings and squallings;" and he imagines him, when able to walk, finding his way into the neighbouring street, and "now, with incipient scientific spirit, puddling in the gutters; now, as small poet (or *maker*), baking mud pies."

2. *Similar* ideas tend to cohere. This is another illustration of the old proverb of "like drawing to like." An admirable specimen of this kind of suggestion occurs in Milton's *Comus*. The heroine is wandering bewildered in a wood at midnight, when she is startled by an outcry which suddenly subsides into silence. This mysterious circumstance conjures up before her all the

\* *Miscellaneous Essays*, vol. iii.

mysterious circumstances of which she has ever read :—

“ This is the place, as well as I may guess,  
Whence even now the tumult of loud mirth  
Was rife, and perfect in my listening ear;  
Yet nought but single darkness do I find.  
What might this be? A thousand fantasies  
Begin to throng into my memory,  
Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,  
And airy tongues, that syllable men’s names  
On sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses.”

3. A *cause* and an *effect* always come into the mind together. We cannot think of an agent without thinking of the result; and we cannot think of the result without thinking of the agent. When Pope, in his *Essay on Man*, chances to refer to those who pride themselves upon their blood, the image of the young aristocrats with the blood suggests the image of the old aristocrats who gave the blood, and forefathers and descendants are described together :—

“ Go, if your ancient but ignoble blood  
Has crept through scoundrels ever since the flood,  
Go, and pretend your family is young,  
Nor own your fathers have been fools so long.  
What can ennoble sots, or slaves, or cowards?  
Alas! not all the blood of all the Howards.”

Such are the great principles which Nature has given us to enable us to remember. Why should

they not be employed in the literary as well as in the ordinary world? If they bind together our random musings, why should they not bind together our set meditations? If they are used *occasionally* in literature, why should they not be used *regularly* in literature? Our mental fabrics, just like our material fabrics, must be put up according to the laws of Nature; for, if this be not done, Nature, with her slow but ceaseless agencies, will inevitably destroy them. It may indeed be said that this is the very way in which the laws of association should never be employed; and that, when they are suffered to influence an author, they carry him away into wearisome digressions. But to this we answer, that *abuse* must be distinguished from *use*; that the fact of a foolish man abusing any method is no reason why a wise man should not use it; and that, in carrying out this plan, as well as any other, common sense and judgment are absolutely necessary. In fact, while employing the associating principles in the grouping of our ideas, we must be careful to take two precautions—

(1.) We must make a comprehensive survey of the subject in hand. This is the very foundation of all literary excellence; and without it the best method and the highest art will be utterly useless. We must go carefully over all the features, distinguishing the character and the value of each. In this way we shall be able to keep out any worthless matter.

(2.) We must apply the laws of association with the greatest judgment. It will be admitted that, in almost every group of ideas, there are several affinities—several ways of joining these ideas together. Now, we must find out in which way the strongest cohesion can be secured—in which way they can be so firmly knit together that the memory will pass inevitably from the one to the other. By this method also we shall detect and throw out any extraneous details.

But the best way, after all, of proving that the associating principles can be of use in literature is to show how easily and effectively they can be applied. This we shall now try to do.

There are two great kinds of representation. We must represent an object either in motion or in rest. In other words, we must either narrate or describe. Of narrative there is only one kind; for in telling a story we must always follow the train of consequences. But of description there are two kinds. When the objects are few, and at the same time important, we go over them all circumstantially; when they are very many we cannot take them all in, but we select those only which tend to produce the great general effect. In other words, there are two kinds of description—the *circumstantial* and the *picturesque*.\*

\* "The picturesque," says Hazlitt, in Essay xxxii. of his *Table Talk*, "is that which stands out and catches the attention by some striking peculiarity."

gether, therefore, there are three kinds of representation—*narrative*, *circumstantial description*, and *picturesque description*. Now, it is clear that these three kinds of representation will be most successful when regulated by the three laws of association. The events of a narrative will be most effective when they are drawn up in the order of *cause and effect*; the details of a circumstantial description will be more easily remembered when they are arranged according to their usual nearness or *contiguity*; and the facts of a picturesque description will be far more striking when they are grouped together according to *resemblance*.\*

But, in applying the laws of association to the three kinds of representation, we must use the two precautions mentioned above. The former precaution, that of taking a comprehensive survey of the whole subject, must be used in the same way in all the three cases. The latter precaution, that of obtaining the strongest cohesion, must be used differently in each. Let us show how that can be done.

1. In a *narrative* we shall obtain the strongest cohesion by keeping in view from the very first,

\* Ancillon, in his *Essais Philosophiques*, says that the imagination arranges ideas in three orders—the natural, the logical, and the poetical. The logical coincides with our narrative method, the natural with the circumstantial, and the poetical with the picturesque.



not only the beginning of the story, but also the end. This rule was recognised by the ancient critics, and is still observed by every practised teller of anecdotes. Keeping the beginning and the end in view, we set out from the right starting-place and go straight towards the right destination; we introduce no event that does not spring from the first cause, and tend to the great effect; we make each detail a link joined to the one going before and the one coming after; we make, in fact, all the details into one entire chain, which we can take up as a whole, carry about with us, and retain as long as we please. Let us suppose, for example, that we are asked to describe the military career of the great Napoleon in a short paragraph. First of all, we would fix upon his appointment to a generalship as the beginning of his career, and his defeat at Waterloo as the end. Keeping these two events in view, we would then proceed to make the other events stretch between them in one connected series. We would show how his appointment to a generalship enabled him to achieve the most astounding victories in Italy and Egypt,—how the glory of these victories incited the enraptured French people to make him First Consul,—how his position as First Consul enabled him to seize the imperial crown,—how the touch of the imperial crown intoxicated him so much that he trampled upon every power in Europe,—and how these insults to a whole continent raised an

opposition which, after being foiled for some time, effected his complete overthrow at Waterloo.

2. In a *circumstantial description* the strongest cohesion will be secured if we arrange the details according to the most customary method. But what *is* this method? This question is easily answered. *It is that method which practical men, wishing to be thorough, would take.\** These men will be sure to find out the most convenient plan; the convenience of the plan will be a reason for following it again; and a plan founded on a reason will inevitably become more customary than a plan for which there is no reason whatever. Let us suppose that an author finds it necessary to describe such a subject as a happy fireside. It is possible to do this in a circumstantial way. He can follow the method which a practical man would adopt, and sketch in turn the objects in front of the fire, those on the right side, and those on the left. And this is exactly what Tennyson does in *Enoch Arden* :—

“ For cups and silver on the burnished board  
Sparkled and shone ; so genial was the hearth ;  
And on the right hand of the hearth he saw  
Philip, the slighted suitor of old times,  
Stout, rosy, with his babe across his knees ;  
And o’er her second father stooped a girl,

\* A simpler, though not such a thorough, method is sometimes followed. The writer takes the objects in the order of nearness, and describes them just as they come.

A later but a loftier Annie Lee,  
Fair-haired and tall, and from her lifted hand  
Dangled a length of ribbon and a ring,  
To tempt the babe, who reared his creasy arms,  
Caught at and ever missed it, and they laughed :  
And on the left hand of the hearth he saw  
The mother glancing often toward her babe,  
But turning now and then to speak with him,  
Her son, who stood beside her tall and strong,  
And saying that which pleased him, for he smiled."

In the circumstantial description of a *locality*—such as a town, a house, or a room—there is a peculiar device that must be noticed. Let the student, in mentioning the different parts of a place, use the cardinal points of the compass—such as north, south, east, and west ; and in doing this he will give each part a distinctive name, and will clearly indicate its relative position.\* It is the neglect of this simple plan that produces the con-

\* Lest the student should despise this device as too prosaic, we may remind him that it is frequently adopted by so great a poet as Milton. Witness his description of Italy:—

"He brought our Saviour to the western side  
Of that high mountain, whence he might behold  
Another plain, long, but in breadth not wide,  
Washed by the southern sea ; and on the north,  
To equal length, backed with a ridge of hills  
That screened the fruits of the earth and seats of men  
From cold septentrion blasts ; thence, in the midst,  
Divided by a river, of whose banks  
On each side an imperial city stood."

—*Paradise Regained*, book iv.

fusion so prevalent in descriptive sketches. If a writer does not use these simple marks, he cannot state the position of each of the main objects; and if he does not state the position of each of the main objects, we shall be unable to form a clear and accurate picture of the scene, and shall simply excite and muddle our brains. It would be much better if he left the whole scene to our imagination.

There is still another way of giving wonderful clearness to such a picture, and we marvel very much that students have not generally adopted it. This is, the drawing of a rough pen-and-ink sketch of the place, of the house or locality, in order to aid the word-description. It need not be elaborate or minute; and lest the reader should become confused with regard to the relative positions of the various objects, let the top of the page represent the north, the right side the east, and so on, just as in a map.

3. Before beginning a *picturesque description* we must first survey carefully all the objects in the scene; and then the strongest cohesion will be obtained if we catch the one or two or three most striking effects, and group the details together which tend to bring out each of these.\* Besides that, we must place nearest to each other, in each

\* "I acquired a great attention to objects; but I only seized them as a whole, so far as they produced an effect."  
— *Goethe's Autobiography*, vol. i. p. 187.

group, those objects that are most akin to each other. Let us suppose, for instance, that we are called upon to describe *An April Day in Town*. As we pass along the streets we note every object carefully; and after generalizing we find that the most characteristic effects are *light* and *liveliness*. Accordingly, we resolve the details into two classes—the former bringing out the *light*, and the latter the *liveliness*; and at the same time we are careful in each class to group inanimate objects with inanimate objects, plants with plants, and animals with animals. In this way the following result is produced:—

“Contrasted with what they were during the black rains of winter, the streets have now a lightsome appearance. The gay sunshine broods upon the sides of the houses, brightening up the gray stone. The pavements grow white under the drying western breeze. Some of the shop-fronts are fresh and glittering with new painting and decoration. In the gardens of the city squares the ground is covered with a fresh green turf, and the branches of the trees are tipped with delicate green buds. The brightest radiance, however, seems to have settled on the ladies' dresses; and all along the fashionable promenades they glance here and there, lighting up with their fresh tints of red, white, and blue, the sober-coloured throngs, and giving an aspect of festivity to the whole city under the sweet spring atmosphere. At the same time, combined with this lightsome appearance there is a prevailing air of liveliness. Sparrows chirp vigorously from the water-

spout; gentlemen, having shuffled off their great-coats, go lightly and blithely along; children swarm upon the pavements—as plentiful and playful as young rabbits at the mouth of a warren; while German musicians, like a strange species of migratory birds with immense brassy bills, straddle in the public way, and pour forth their wild notes to the busy crowd.”

It is scarcely necessary to say, that where we describe anything by means of metaphorical language we are using the picturesque method. We mention those features only which are like the features of the object which we are sketching. For example, when an old writer, in dashing off the portrait of the infamous Titus Oates, cleverly remarks, that “his face was a complete circle, of which his mouth was the centre,” he only mentions two parts of the figurative object.

Sometimes we find in one short paragraph all these three methods mixed up together. When authors represent a person as coming into a certain scene, they may describe the general effect which his appearance produces; in other words, they may give a *picturesque description*. Then they may tell what he says and does, and how he is received by the other people there; in other words, they may give a *narrative*. And, last of all, they may go on to describe how, after a time, the stranger's features, one by one, were noted; in other words, they may give a *circumstantial description*. It is the circumstantial and pictu-

resque methods, however, that can be used, and are very often used, together with most effect. After giving an account of the particular appearances of an object, an author will produce a greater impression on his reader if he concludes by giving the general appearance. It is like clenching a detailed argument by a concise and pithy summary. We would, therefore, advise every student, when he has time, to add the picturesque description to the circumstantial;\* and if he wishes to see how effectively this can be done, even in a short piece, he needs only to study the famous sketch of Hamlet's father:—

“ See what a grace was seated on his brow :  
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;  
An eye like Mars to threaten or command;  
A station like the herald Mercury,  
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;  
A combination, and a form, indeed,  
Where every god did seem to set his seal,  
To give the world assurance of a man.”

Such are the three methods that may be used in literature. Let me show, in conclusion, the three great advantages that will be derived from the use of them.

1. Unnecessary ideas will be left out. If we have a method we shall survey at one glance our

\* In many cases the student may find it more effective to begin with the picturesque.

whole subject. We shall know where to begin and where to end, what details to take in and what to leave out. We shall make a fair start, go straight forward, swerving neither to the right nor to the left, and when we have reached the conclusion we shall stop; and the general result will be clear and effective conciseness. There are many instances of this merit in Burns—an author who always saw the mark, shot his ideas straight towards it, and never failed to hit it. Witness how, in four short lines, he calls up before us all the pride, pomp, and circumstance of war:—

“ The trumpets sound, the banners fly,  
The glittering spears are rankèd ready,  
The shouts of war are heard afar,  
The battle closes thick and bloody.”

2. Unnecessary words will be left out. One of the greatest difficulties of a young writer consists in passing from one sentence to another. After he has finished the one, he knows not how to begin the other. And even when he has begun it, the connexion between it and the one going before is not apparent. He is, therefore, forced to solder them together with such clumsy compositions as “ notwithstanding,” “ nevertheless,” “ this being the case,” “ be that as it may.” But the author who has classified his ideas has no such difficulty. The connexion between his sentences is natural, and, therefore, evident; and no artificial bonds are re-



quired. He passes from the one to the other with the greatest ease, and expresses what he has to say in the fewest words. In Pope's famous passage on Education we see this exemplified in the most masterly way. The first couplet states the great truth that man's character is determined by his training; and all the other sentences are cases that have been selected and arranged to prove this. Accordingly, the one follows the other without any parade or waste of words; and the whole series forms a portrait-gallery equally remarkable for its variety and the small space which it occupies:—

“ 'Tis Education forms the common mind ;  
Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined.  
Boastful and rough, your first son is a squire.  
The next a tradesman, meek, and much a liar.  
Tom struts a soldier, open, bold, and brave.  
Will sneaks a scrivener, an exceeding knave.  
Is he a Churchman ? Then he's fond of power.  
A Quaker ? Sly. A Presbyterian ? Sour.  
A smart free-thinker ? All things in an hour.”

3. All the sentences of a paragraph will combine to produce one great general effect. They are all parts of one organized whole, and they all help to produce one result. Like a battalion of soldiers, they are all influenced by one sentiment, they all move in harmony, and they all bear down with resistless force upon one point. A spirited instance of this is given in Tennyson's description of the

Peninsular War. The end he has in view in the passage is the expulsion of the French from Spain by Wellington ; and all the clauses, short, abrupt, and vigorous, seem to be rushing on to this great conclusion :—

“ Round affrighted Lisbon drew  
The treble works, the vast designs  
Of his laboured rampant lines,  
Where he greatly stood at bay,  
Whence he issued forth anew,  
And ever great and greater grew,  
Beating from the wasted vines  
Back to France her banded swarms,  
Back to France with countless blows,  
Till o'er the hills her eagles flew,  
Beyond the Pyrenæan pines,  
Followed up in valley and glen,  
With blare of bugle, clamour of men,  
Roll of cannon, and clash of arms,  
And England pouring on her foes.”

With these three advantages we shall be able to make our words memorable. Our descriptions, stripped of all unnecessary details and unnecessary words, and bent towards one end, will enter any brain however dull, and fix themselves there for ever.

#### EXERCISES.

1. In the following extract there are a narrative and a picturesque description. Let the student separate

them, and write out in the form of notes the bare details of each :—

“ Yet can I endure the jocularity of a young sweep with something more than forgiveness. In the last winter but one, pacing along Cheapside with my accustomed precipitation when I walk westward, a treacherous slide brought me upon my back in an instant. I scrambled up with pain and shame enough—yet outwardly trying to face it down as if nothing had happened—when the roguish grin of one of these young wits encountered me. There he stood, pointing me out with his dusky finger to the mob, and to a poor woman (I suppose his mother) in particular, till the tears for the exquisiteness of the fun (so he thought it) worked themselves out at the corners of his poor red eyes, red from many a previous weeping, and soot-inflamed, yet twinkling through all with such a joy, snatched out of desolation, that Hogarth—but Hogarth has got him already (how could he miss him?) in the March to Finchley, grinning at the pieman—there he stood, as he stands in the picture, irremovable, as if the jest was to last for ever—with such a maximum of glee and minimum of mischief in his mirth—for the grin of a genuine sweep hath absolutely no malice in it—that I could have been content, if the honour of a gentleman might endure it, to have remained his butt and his mockery till midnight.”

2. In the following quotation there are two narratives and one picturesque description. Let the student group them in the way indicated in the previous exercise :—

"To-day my lord of Amiens and myself  
Did steal behind him, as he lay along  
Under an oak, whose antique root peeps out  
Upon the brook that brawls along this wood;  
To the which place a poor sequestered stag,  
That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt,  
Did come to languish; and, indeed, my lord,  
The wretched animal heaved forth such groans,  
That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat  
Almost to bursting; and the big round tears  
Coursed one another down his innocent nose  
In piteous chase; and thus the hairy fool,  
Much marked of the melancholy Jacques,  
Stood on the extremest verge of the swift brook  
Augmenting it with tears."

3. This exercise consists of the notes of a circumstantial description purposely disarranged. The student is required to arrange them and expand them into a full description :—

#### THE TOMB OF SHAKESPEARE.

In the chancel—a bust over the grave, in a niche of the wall—a finely-arched forehead—cheerful and social disposition—aspect pleasant and serene—flat stone marks the spot—we approached the church through the avenue of limes—gothic porch—doors of massive oak—interior spacious—architecture and embellishments superior—inscription mentions age at time of his decease—fifty-two years—place solemn and sepulchral—tall elms wave before the painted windows—low perpetual murmur of the Avon heard.

4. The following are the disarranged notes of a picturesque description. The student is required to arrange them according to the rules laid down in the present chapter, and to expand them into a full sketch:

A COUNTRY GENTLEMAN IN LONDON IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

Marked out as an excellent subject for swindlers and banterers—gazed at the shops—stumbled into the gutters—bullies jostled him—ran against porters—stood under the waterspouts—thieves explored his huge pockets—money-droppers introduced themselves—enraged and mortified—returned to his mansion—in homage of tenants found consolation—if he went into a shop—secondhand embroidery—copper rings—watches that would not go—once more a great man—nothing above himself—except the judge at the assizes, and the lord-lieutenant at the muster of the militia.

## CHAPTER II.

### OBSERVATION.

Composition, like the Fine Arts, should be studied from Nature—  
A Course of Studies—Persons—Rooms—Houses—Towns—  
Weather—Incidents—Landscapes—States of Consciousness—  
Works of Art—Other Subjects.

MOST of the subjects that are prescribed in composition seriously injure the mind. Such themes as the "Origin of Language," and the "Immateriality of the Soul," serve as bugbears to the ordinary student. He is paralyzed by them, and deprived of the use of most of his faculties. Then in despair he is driven into an unknown region of book-lore, where, with the small remnant of his capacity, he gropes feebly about, seizes upon any sentences or paragraphs that seem suitable to his purpose, and throws them together in the form of an essay. This is not composition; but a kind of literary patchwork.

Very different is the plan which we propose. According to it the students go out into the ordinary world, where they feel thoroughly at home, and where all their faculties are brought

into healthy and delightful play. Their attention is directed to those objects with which their daily life will in future be concerned. Wherever they go, they are studying composition. In the country they note with interest the ever-changing splendour of the air, earth, and sky; the noble outlines of swelling hill and solemn wood; the old edifices which time has toned down, and made picturesque; and the endless variety of animals, plants, houses, and scenes. In the town their eyes are charmed by the long lines of massive masonry; the spacious squares, formed by pillared mansions, and adorned with trees and statues; the bright array of shops, with every article that is exquisite in workmanship, or soft to the touch, or resplendent to the eye; the stately steeples, tapering upwards to the clouds, and the ever-shifting scene of human forms and faces. And when they have chosen any one of these objects as a subject for description, they place themselves in its very presence, face to face with it, and carefully note its most remarkable features. They are thus like the students of the fine arts, who make their studies from nature, and whose great aim is to copy the chief details as truthfully as possible.

At this place, however, several objections may be started. One critic may declare that it would be utterly inconvenient, if not impossible, to write an essay in the open air. The answer to this is very easy. It is not at all necessary that the stu-

dent should sit down and write a full description on the spot. He only requires, as he looks carefully at the object, to form the chief descriptive phrases in his mind, fixing them in his memory by frequent repetition, or jotting them down in his note-book.

Another objector may say that this rigid method of study, which is so suitable for painting, is not suitable for composition; and he may adduce as a reason the fact, that colours are a far more palpable medium of representation than words. To this we answer, that the very imperfection of words makes it all the more necessary that we should use every means of ensuring correctness.

Let us now suppose that the student is prepared to begin a thorough course of studies from observation. How will he proceed? In what order will he take up the different subjects? There is no order that can absolutely be said to be the most natural; but he may follow what may be regarded as the most obvious. He may follow the order in which, when we are children, the subjects present themselves to our notice, arranging them in this manner: persons, rooms, houses, towns, weather, incidents, landscapes, and states of consciousness, works of art.\* Under each of these heads he must

\* It may be said that it is absurd to waste the time of young people in describing such ordinary objects as men, houses, rooms, etc.; for, in the first place, such descriptions will never be demanded from them in future life; and, in the



then choose the subject that will prove most interesting, and afford the fullest scope for his powers. Having done this, let him first proceed to observe the object closely and accurately, noting all the characteristics of form, colour, and other details. Then, while he studies it, let him fix upon one of those plans for arranging details which are laid down in the chapter on Method; and if he adhere rigidly to this, he will accomplish the description with comparative ease and satisfaction.

While he is engaged in this task, however, there are certain deadly mistakes against which he must guard. Sometimes the innate laziness of human nature will tempt him to sit at his ease and write from recollection; but if he really desires to make any progress, he will resist this temptation. He must make it a matter of conscience to scan the object anew for the express purpose of describing it, and to form his descriptive phrases on the very spot. At another time he will come upon a subject so peculiar and so complicated that words will prove utterly inadequate to sketch it. In this case,

second place, they are without interest. Now, when we consider that such sketches must be made by authors and speakers of every kind—and, in fact, by every ordinary person who visits some new scene, and writes to his friends an account of his experiences—we shall see that the first objection is groundless. And we shall find, too, the absurdity of the second, when we reflect that some of the most enchanting pieces in the great poets and novelists are descriptions of these objects.

let him desist at once before his brain is jumbled. Let him remember that discretion is sometimes the better part of valour; and let him imitate the example of those wise authors who, when they run against such objects, talk of them as "nondescript," and "things that may be imagined but cannot be described."

To aid the student we shall now illustrate each of the above-mentioned classes of subjects, both by explanations and examples. Let him first read and master these; then let him choose a subject of the same kind; and after studying it face to face, let him describe it according to the directions and specimens given.

#### PERSONS.

There are several causes which combine to make persons a most interesting study. First of all, Nature has made them of different conditions, long and short, plump and lean, dark and fair, handsome and ill-favoured. The clothier then comes in, and covers them with every variety of garb, from the spotless apparel of the walking clothes-horse, down to the fluttering tatters of the human scarecrow. Meanwhile passion has been operating, and has been gradually stamping each face with a peculiar character. Then, last of all, old age begins to act, bending the body, blanching the hair, and covering the face with countless wrinkles. Thus it happens that any group or crowd is a field

of study, where the observer will always find forms and faces ever new and ever interesting.

In describing persons all the three methods may be used: the circumstantial, the picturesque, and the narrative.

The *circumstantial* method is chiefly used in advertising in the newspapers for people who have been lost. The advertiser enumerates accurately the different particulars, mentioning them very much in the same order in which they would strike an observer, such as the figure, the height, the colour of the hair, the colour of the eyes, the complexion, the kind of clothes, and any special peculiarity. This method, though absolutely essential in advertisements, is not generally effective in literature. Although it arranges all the details in a certain order, it does not form them into a unity by giving the general effect. It furnishes certain detached ideas to the understanding, but does not present a complete picture to the imagination. It draws up a catalogue, but does not paint a portrait. Yet there are certain cases, even in literary description, where the circumstantial method may be used with striking effect. When all the peculiarities of a person are in keeping, and especially when they are all brought harmoniously into play in some action, we can produce a complete picture by simply enumerating the details. As an instance let us take the following sketch:—

“One evening, while attending a lecture on Southey,

I noticed among the audience a boy whose appearance struck me as being very peculiar. He was a thick-set urchin, about twelve years of age, and clad in a coarse kilt. He had a bullet-head covered with a rebellious shock of hair, lumpish cheeks, and small clear eyes deeply set in fat. His stockings and shoes were all bespattered with red mud; and in a grimy hand he held a novel called 'Ocean Waifs.' As the lecture proceeded he turned his round face upon the speaker. And when the description of Bishop Hatto being eaten up by the rats was read, a vibration of delight struck through his whole frame. His small eyes twinkled, his teeth glistened, two deep dents appeared in his cheeks, and his dirty shoes went drumming upon the floor in an uncontrollable fit of ecstasy."

The *picturesque method* is the one that is chiefly used by the best writers. With a comprehensive glance they take in all the details, and catch at once the general impression. Having done this, they bring in those details that tend to produce that impression, and they leave out those that would only dissipate the attention of the reader. In other words, they sketch those features only that are peculiar to the man, and that mark his individuality. For example, Shakespeare, in describing the courtier that was sent to demand the prisoners from Hotspur, does not attempt to give all his various qualities. He merely mentions those features which show his effeminacy:—

"I remember, when the fight was done,  
When I was dry with rage and extreme toil,

Breathless and faint, leaning upon my sword,  
Came there a certain lord, neat, trimly dressed,  
Fresh as a bridegroom; and his chin new-reaped  
Showed like a stubble-land at harvest-home;  
He was perfumed like a milliner;  
And 'twixt his finger and his thumb he held  
A pouncet-box, which ever and anon  
He gave his nose and took't away again."

This method is carried out to a great length by our illustrious dramatists, novelists, and historians. By means of their wonderful dramatic faculty, they can place themselves in the position of a person, invest themselves with his characteristic qualities, put life and vigour into those qualities, and make them appear in speech and action. Thus it happens that a biography is not, what it has been so often called, a full-length portrait. It is rather a series of portraits of the same individual in many different attitudes.\*

On certain rare occasions the *narrative mode* is used in the description of persons. One of the gods, or another supernatural agent, is represented as making a man, adding one faculty after another, and at last completing him and giving him a name. This plan is so strange that it can scarcely fail to excite interest; but at the same time it is so unnatural that it can only be tolerated in extreme

\* In this, as in almost all the other exercises on Observation, the circumstantial and picturesque methods can be combined. See chapter on Method, p. 31.

cases. It is exemplified in Garrick's satire upon Goldsmith :—

“ Here, Hermes, says Jove, who with nectar was  
mellow,  
Go, fetch me some clay, I will make an odd fellow.  
Right and wrong shall be jumbled—much gold and  
some dross ;  
Without cause to be pleased, without cause to be  
cross ;  
Be sure as I work to throw in contradictions,  
A great love of truth, yet a mind turned to fictions ;  
Now mix these ingredients, which, warmed in the  
baking,  
Turn to learning and gaming, religion and raking.

Though a mixture so odd, he shall merit great fame,  
And among brother mortals, be Goldsmith his name.”

It is scarcely necessary to say that the same methods may be applied to the description of the inferior animals. Naturalists use the circumstantial, and poets the picturesque. Here, for example, is the sketch of a cock by Chaucer :—

“ His comb was redder than the fine corál,  
Embattled as it were a castle wall ;  
His bill was black, and as the jet it shone ;  
Like azure were his leggés and his toën ;  
His nailés whiter than the lily flower,  
And like the burnished gold was his colour.” \*

\* Canterbury Tales.

## ROOMS.

Severe critics may object to this subject as being too meagre; but they are mistaken. If we view rooms simply by themselves, they are well worthy of our notice; and whether we look at the aristocratic saloon, airy, elegant, and resplendent and soft with every luxurious device, or the beggar's hovel, small, dark, damp, and bare, we shall find something to draw our attention. But when we consider them in their connexion with human life, they become much more interesting. A man who inhabits a room for a considerable time insensibly writes his character upon it; and if we are at all intelligent we can easily read that character. From the furniture and ornaments we can gather whether he is rich or poor; from the arrangement of the different articles we can infer his orderly or disorderly habits; and from the books and instruments lying about, we can determine with certainty his tastes and pursuits.

The circumstantial and the picturesque are the methods used in describing rooms.

When the student sets himself to describe a room *circumstantially*, the first question that occurs to him is, What is the most natural method of taking up the details? This, we think, can be answered with the greatest certainty. A practical man who aimed at giving a thorough and correct account of a room would adopt the following sys-

tem :—He would first note its length, breadth, and height. He would then mention the number and position of the doors and windows, and also the position of the fireplace. The description of the walls, the roof, and the floor, would next come in as a matter of course. Passing on to the chief articles of furniture, he would note, not only their appearance, but also the positions which they occupy relatively to the doors, or the windows, or the fire. Last of all, if he wished to be graphic, he would give the general effects of the whole room, bringing in at the same time those little scattered circumstances which indicate the character of the tenants.

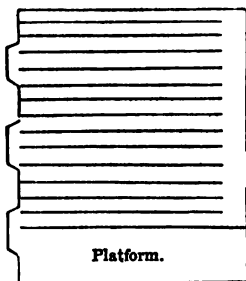
Here it is necessary to give the student an advice. In describing a room, as well as all other localities, the student must draw a pen-and-ink sketch, and use the names of the four cardinal points of the compass. The former device makes the shape and general plan of the place actually visible. By means of the latter device each of the four walls will get a simple name indicating its exact relative position ; and the situation of an object will be easily described by saying, that it stands on the north, south, east, or west wall.

Let us take as an example the following description of a lecture-hall :—

“The hall is a large, high-roofed, oblong room, stretching from north to south. On the west wall are two doors, one admitting to the body of the hall, and



the other to the platform; and on the east wall are three large windows.



At the north end is a platform, fronted with a long table which extends across the whole breadth of the room, and backed by an array of black boards, and glimpses of stoves, boilers, and pipes, which suggest abstract problems in algebra, or interesting experiments in natural philosophy, or startling chemical explosions. Rising from the platform in an inclined plane up to the south wall, are rows of benches, which, on lecture nights, are crowded with eager and intelligent faces imbibing the showers of knowledge that are projected from the mind of the lecturer. The whole apartment is destitute of ornament, and has a thorough utilitarian and work-a-day appearance. It is like a sensible mechanic, who does not care to be very spruce and glossy, but who prefers to have a sprinkling of dust on his coat and face, because it looks business-like and thriving."

There is no doubt, however, that in poetry and in other kinds of imaginative literature the *pic-*

*turesque* method of describing a room is the most effective. Where, for instance, could we find a more graphic sketch than the following taken from Thomson's *Castle of Indolence* :—

“ The doors that knew no shrill alarming bell,  
No cursed knocker plied by villain's hand,  
Self-opened into halls, where who can tell  
What elegance and grandeur wide expand,  
The pride of Turkey and of Persia land.  
Soft quilts on quilts, on carpets carpets spread,  
And couches stretched around in seemly band,  
And endless pillows rise to prop the head,  
So that each spacious room was one full-swelling bed.”

In this piece every detail gives the idea of most luxurious idleness. The inmate, when about to enter, does not require to put out his hand, for the doors open of their own accord. Nor does he need to take the trouble to sit down. It behoves him only to allow himself to sink ; and sofas on every side are ready to receive him, and pillows rise to prop his head. And should he stumble, he suffers not the slightest inconvenience, for carpets have been spread on carpets and quilts on quilts, and he finds himself lolling in “ one full-swelling bed.”

## HOUSES.

At first sight, houses may seem to be a most uninteresting subject ; but, on consideration, we shall see that they have many peculiarities which

are worthy of notice. They are of different materials, and of almost every shape. Their situations, too, are various. Some nestle in valleys, and others gleam on the steep hillside; a few stand alone on the bleak moor, and many are massed together in the form of villages or towns. Time, also, with his finger has made them picturesque. He has rubbed out their stiff, straight lines, rounded their angles, toned down with weather-stains and lichen their raw colours, and muffled some in ever-green leaves. But the greatest charm of all has been thrown around them by human life; for there is not one of these houses, however humble it may be, which has not been hallowed by the joys and sorrows of men, the shedding of tender, sympathetic tears, and the meeting of kindly, beaming faces.

“All houses wherein men have lived and died  
Are haunted houses. Through the open doors  
The harmless phantoms on their errands glide,  
With feet that make no sound upon the floors.  
We meet them at the doorway, on the stair,  
Along the passages they come and go,  
Impalpable impressions on the air,  
A sense of something moving to and fro.”\*

Hopelessly dull will the student be, who can look upon any habitation, and see nothing in it that is worthy of a formal description.

The methods used in this kind of description are the circumstantial and the picturesque.

\* Longfellow.

When we employ the *circumstantial* method, in what order should we describe the different details? To answer this question let us ask, In what order are they generally taken up by those whose business it is to deal with them all? The reply is obvious. The builder, the man whose occupation it is to consider all the particulars of a house, takes them up in the following order: situation, plan, walls, roof, windows, door, and surroundings. It is true that in the description of any elaborate edifice this method will be utterly ineffective. The technicalities of architecture will require to be known, in the first place, to the author, that he may be able to describe, and in the next place to the reader, that he may be able to understand. And even then the description will not be satisfactory. The reader will become bewildered in a maze of details, and will find that such a sketch should rather be undertaken by the pencil of the draughtsman than by the pen of the writer. But when the plan of the house is simple, and, above all, when the particulars are in keeping, an effective picture may be produced; and the imagination of the reader will realize the picture much more distinctly, if the writer will draw with his pen a rough sketch of the building. Let us take as an example the following description:—

“The house is a low, thatched building, about a mile north from Edinburgh. The Ferry Road, running east and west, passes its north wall. One gable looks to

the east, and another to the west. Originally it has been a cattle-shed; and it is now transformed into



dwellings for two families. But little has been done to make it comfortable. The walls look as if they had been washed with a mixture of whitening and mud. The thatch on the roof is rotting, and is overgrown with bright green patches of moss. Perched on the top of each gable is a brick chimney, so very small that it suggests a wretched fireside within. The wall next the road has no windows, but only two doorways; and even the doors are not weather-proof. Below them are large foot-worn cavities through which the north wind can enter, carrying faceaches, toothaches, and catarrhs to the shivering inmates."

Avoiding the circumstantial method because it is prosaic or difficult or unnecessary, most descriptive authors choose to be *picturesque*. They describe the general effect of the house, introducing those particulars only which produce that effect, and leaving out the others as useless. These sketches, accordingly, are short, but at the same time they are bold and striking. A happy

example is found in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The house described there suggests the idea of bulkiness, and, therefore, every detail introduced is of uncommon size :—

“Tom Pinch’s sister was governess in a family—a lofty family—perhaps the wealthiest brass and copper founder’s family known to mankind. They lived at Camberwell, in a house so big and fierce, that its mere outside, like the outside of a giant’s castle, struck terror into vulgar minds, and made bold persons quail. There was a great front gate, with a great hall, whose handle was in itself a note of admiration ; and a great lodge, which, being close to the house, rather spoilt the look-out certainly, but made the look-in tremendous.”

#### TOWNS.

To prove what an interesting subject a town ought to be, let us give an idea of the way in which it has arisen. Like an animal or a plant, it has grown gradually, and its form has been determined by material causes. Its site, from being near some great social advantage, such as a highway, or a sheltered creek, or a river, or a religious edifice, or a castle, drew towards it some enterprising settlers. One after another began to build adwelling, and the work proceeded at intervals during a long course of years. There was no prescribed plan for either streets or houses. The street was made to follow the line of the beaten

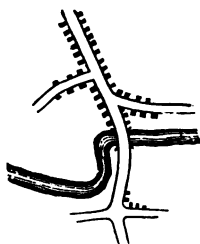
path that had existed there from time immemorial, and to adapt itself to every bend and sudden turning. And in erecting his house, each man did what seemed right in his own eyes. Some made the sides of their buildings face the streets; others the gables. Some raised several stories; others only one. In the course of time the inhabitants, forming themselves into a corporation, set up a local government; and new squares and terraces were built according to a fixed plan. But what had been done before could not be undone. The old street, or rather lane, remains; and with its moss-grown stones, tumble-down walls, and broken-backed roofs, forms a monument on which the tastes and habits of its builders are written in unmistakable characters.

In describing towns two methods may be followed: the circumstantial and the picturesque.

Before we begin the *circumstantial* description of a town, we must find out in what order a practical man would take up the different details. Let us therefore suppose the case of a landed proprietor who is about to erect a town on his estate. He must, in the first place, fix upon the site. In the second place, he must lay down the directions of the streets, running east and west, or north and south, as the case may be. The building of the houses then engages his attention; and he bestows especial care upon the erection of some public edifice, such as a church or a town-hall. After the

houses are finished, he next considers the people who are to be the inhabitants; and, last of all, he may turn his regards upon any accidental circumstances that may affect the interests of the new community. This, then, is the order in which the details of a town ought to be taken: the site, the plan of the streets, the houses, including any public edifice, the inhabitants, and any stray particulars of interest. Of course it should be illustrated with a pen-and-ink sketch.

Carlyle, who, in spite of his seeming eccentricity, is always thoroughly practical, gives a fine instance of this kind in his account of the birth-place of Cromwell. The only detail which he finds it unnecessary to mention is the character of the inhabitants.



“Huntingdon lies pleasantly along the left bank of the Ouse; sloping pleasantly upwards from Ouse Bridge, which connects it with the old village of Godmanchester; the town itself consisting mainly of one fair street, which towards the north end of it opens into a kind of irregular market-place, and then contracting again soon



terminates. The two churches of All Saints' and St John's, as you walk up northward from the bridge, appear successively on the left, the churchyards flanked with shops and other houses. The Ouse, which is of very circular course in this quarter—'winding as if reluctant to enter the fen-country,' says the topographer—has still a respectable drab colour, gathered from the clays of Bedfordshire; has not yet the Stygian black which in a few miles further it assumes for good. Huntingdon, as it were, looks over into the fens; Godmanchester, just across the river, already stands on black bog. The country to the east is all fen (mostly unreclaimed in Oliver's time, and still of a dropsical character); to the west it is hard green ground, agreeably broken into little heights, duly fringed with wood, and bearing marks of comfortable, long-continued cultivation. Here, on the edge of the firm green land, and looking over into the black marshes with their alder-trees and willow-trees, did Oliver Cromwell pass his young years."

A simpler style of circumstantial description is sometimes possible. When the scene is familiar, and when the order in which the details are arranged must have been observed by every one, the task of the author is simple. The fact that the details in such an order are well known, guarantees that they will be remembered. They must be impressed already upon the public mind, and that impression simply requires to be revived. The author therefore describes the objects in the order of their proximity, beginning with the nearest and

going on gradually towards the most distant. A very happy instance of this method occurs in Tennyson's *Enoch Arden* :—

“Long lines of cliff breaking have left a chasm ;  
And in the chasm are foam and yellow sands ;  
Beyond, red props about a narrow wharf  
In clusters ; then a mouldered church ; and higher  
A long street climbs to one tall-towered mill ;  
And high in heaven behind it a gray down  
With Danish barrows ; and a hazel wood,  
By autumn nutters haunted, flourishes  
Green in a cuplike hollow of the down.”

Many authors, however, never attempt to give a circumstantial account of a town. Their great aim is to give the general impression which the place produces upon the onlooker, and to specify those facts which conspire to bring out the effect ; and accordingly they choose to be *picturesque*. An imposing instance of this kind of sketch is given by Mr Disraeli in his last work \* :—

“Below and before them, on an undulating site, a city of palaces and churches spread out its august form, enclosing within its ample walls sometimes a wilderness of classic ruins—column and arch and theatre—sometimes the umbrageous spread of princely gardens. A winding and turbid river divided the city in unequal parts, in one of which there rose a vast and glorious temple crowned with a dome of almost superhuman

\* Lothair, vol. iii. p. 18.

size and skill, on which the favoured sign of heaven flashed with triumphant truth."

In this description of Rome, augustness is the prevailing feature; and all the details, the ample walls, the palaces and churches, the "column and arch and theatre," "the spread of princely gardens," "the vast and glorious temple," and "the dome of almost superhuman size and skill," impress this idea upon the mind. The only flaw in the picture is that meaningless phrase about the favoured sign of heaven flashing with triumphant truth.

#### WEATHER.

Eminent authors have differed about this topic. "Don't let us talk about the weather," said Dr Johnson. On the other hand, Kant, the great German philosopher, thought it a very important subject, and used to discuss it at his daily dinner-parties. On it depended not only his usual walk, but the healthy state both of his mind and body. But besides such benefits as these, the weather has other claims to our notice. It is the great agent in working that wondrous panorama of earth and sky with which we are surrounded. A mighty though eccentric artist, it is constantly effecting magical changes on that great picture,—at one time blackening it with rain, or whitening it with snow; at another time touching up the mountain-peaks with the clearest tints, and covering the

valleys with the richest and warmest colouring, and again brushing and washing away these bright hues, and leaving nothing but a few bare and bleak outlines. Surely, therefore, the atmospheric changes and their striking effects upon the landscape are a most interesting study to every active mind.

In sketching the weather we may use all the three methods: the circumstantial, the picturesque, and the narrative.

In a *circumstantial* description of this kind we should adopt the order which a weather-seer uses in gathering his details. He first notes the state of the sky, then its effect upon the earth, and, last of all, its effect upon the different kinds of animals. Adopting this order, we might produce the following sketch of *A Rainy Day in Winter on a Country Road*:—

“One large, thick, wet cloud fills the whole concave of heaven, and settles upon the earth, shrouding every object. Ceaselessly and monotonously the rain pours down, as if the very skies were melting. It drips from the leafless trees and hedges, it flows in runnels from the roof of the farmhouse, blackening all its walls, and it soaks every inch of ground. The footpath is swimming with water, the road is wrought up into a channel of red liquid mud, and a solitary woman that trudges along is thoroughly drenched and draggled. The only beings that seem to defy the depressing influence of the day are a drayman and his horse. The horse triumphantly

turns the rain, that falls upon his coat, into steam; and the man rolls on, stout, fresh, and rosy, as if he were some lively water-monster, and were revelling in his native element."

It is the circumstantial method that Thomson generally uses in his great weather scenes. Take, as a specimen, his sketch of a midsummer noon:—

"'Tis raging noon; and, vertical, the sun  
Darts on the head direct his forceful rays.  
O'er heaven and earth, far as the ranging eye  
Can sweep, a dazzling deluge reigns; and all,  
From pole to pole, is undistinguished blaze.  
In vain the sight, dejected to the ground,  
Stoops for relief; thence hot ascending steams  
And keen reflection pain. Deep to the root  
Of vegetation parched, the cleaving fields  
And slippery lawn an arid hue disclose,  
Blast Fancy's bloom, and wither even the soul.  
Echo no more returns the cheerful sound  
Of sharpening scythe: the mower, sinking, heaps  
O'er him the humid hay, with flowers perfumed;  
And scarce a chirping grasshopper is heard  
Through the dumb mead."

Here the poet introduces the objects in their natural order. His gaze is first directed to the heavens, and he beholds the sun in his burning splendour, and the air flooded with a "dazzling deluge." Blinded with the "blaze" he casts his eyes to the ground, and then he notes the effects of the parching heat—first upon the earth, for the

fields are "cleaving," and the lawn is "slippery;" and last upon animals, for man is overpowered, and bird, beast, and insect are completely dumb.

The *picturesque* method, too, is very much used, especially by poets. Hampered by the necessities of the rhythm, they are fain to choose those details only which will bring out the desired effect, and to group them in the order that is convenient. For instance, Coleridge, in his description of the calmness of a moonlight night, mentions only the smooth bay, the reflection of the moon in the water, and the silvery beams falling upon the solitary church and motionless vane; and cares not to follow any particular arrangement:—

"The harbour-bay was clear as glass,  
So smoothly it was strewn;  
And on the bay the moonlight lay,  
And the shadow of the moon.  
The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,  
That stands above the rock:  
The moonlight steeped in silentness  
The steady weathercock."

An author may also describe the weather in a *narrative* form. Treating it as an event, he may sketch its rise, progress, and manifold consequences. This is done inimitably by Thackeray in his *White Squall*:—

"A squall upon a sudden  
Came o'er the waters scudding,  
And the clouds began to gather,  
And the sea was lashed to lather,

And the lowering thunder grumbled,  
And the lightning jumped and tumbled,  
And the ship and all the ocean  
Woke up in wild commotion.  
Then the wind set up a howling,  
And the poodle dog a yowling,  
And the cocks began a crowing,  
And the old cow raised a lowing  
As she heard the tempest blowing ;  
And fowls and geese did cackle,  
And the cordage and the tackle  
Began to shriek and crackle ;  
And the spray dashed o'er the funnels  
And down the deck in runnels ;  
And the rushing water soaks all,  
From the seamen in the fo'ksal  
To the stokers, whose black faces  
Peer out of their bed-places ;  
And the captain he was bawling,  
And the sailors pulling, hauling,  
And the quarterdeck tarpauling  
Was shivered in the squalling ;  
And the passengers awaken  
Most pitifully shaken ;  
And the steward jumps up, and hastens  
For the necessary basins."

## INCIDENTS.

A student may declare that his life is so quiet and commonplace that he sees no incidents worthy of record. But surely there is no force in this

objection. He stands in this wonderful theatre of a world, where the scenes are ever shifting, and the great tragedy of the world's history is for ever going on. He may not see events as great as the majority of those of which he has read; but if he has a sympathetic heart and an observant eye, he must witness many strange phenomena; and if he describe these phenomena correctly, he will add another unit to the ever-increasing sum of human knowledge, and shed another ray of light upon the great mystery of human existence.

In describing an incident there is, of course, only one method—the *narrative*. To use this effectively we must grasp the whole event. We must see clearly the beginning and the end, and introduce those facts only that rise from the former and tend to the latter. As an example of an incident, let me quote an account of one of Dickens's *Last Readings in Edinburgh*:—

“The reading was given on the evening of the 24th February 1869. It took place in the Music Hall, which was crowded in every part. Precisely at the hour Mr Dickens came in upon the platform, and took up his position behind a small table. In his left hand he held a book; and he kept his right hand free for gesture. Without a single word of preamble he began, and no sooner had he begun than we saw that he was throwing himself soul and body into his representation. His soul realized every thought and feeling; and his body was a sensitive index express-



ing accurately whatever his soul realized. Not only with words did he tell the story, but with potent eye, plastic countenance, and wiry frame. And when he represented a character speaking, how easily he transformed himself into the speaker. The effect was magical. We actually saw the different persons, each in his turn, rise, talk for a time, and then vanish. First, Boots appeared; and, with straddling legs, slouching shoulders, and awkward wave of the hand, told his tale. Then Fagin stood before us—old, toothless, peering, spiteful. He disappeared, and, in his place, behold Noah Claypole—lank, greedy, and sneaking! A deep growl was heard, and Sykes, the brutal robber, was there in all the roughness of reality. These last three characters were made to come, and speak, and go, with the greatest ease and effect. At length Mrs Gamp appeared, and, with husky voice, detailed her experience, and reported the complimentary speeches of her imaginary friend, Mrs Harris. She stopped; and by almost all the audience the voice of the mighty magician was heard for the last time."

#### LANDSCAPES.

This earth has been made an inexhaustible field of observation for man. In the early epochs the agency of fire and water wrought and moulded its surface into an endless variety of forms. It heaved up the mighty ranges of mountains with all their toppling crags and dizzy peaks, hollowed and wore down the valleys and deep ravines, spread out the

undulating expanses of the plains, let loose the rivers to flow across the continents, and brought in the, "shining levels" of the sea to form a setting to the solid land. Then the powers of vegetation, modified by the industry of man, began to act upon this wide arena. Rows of pine-trees softened the hard outlines of the cliffs; thickets of brushwood feathered the sides of the glens; and strips and belts of woodland, interspersed with pastures and corn-fields, made the wide champaign one living and trembling sea of verdure. The wild flowers especially, clustering everywhere, gave a general aspect of luxuriance. They swathed up the scars of the rocks with their soft leaves; they made the waste places gay with their bright blossoms; they crowded together in such profusion round the brooks that they hid in some places the gleaming waters; and they ran in rich green borders along the edge of the highway, and flourished and bloomed under the very foot of the traveller. In the meanwhile, over all was spread the resplendent dome of heaven, dimmed and darkened here and there by vapours and clouds, and shedding down glooms and splendours to heighten the effect of the landscape.

As interesting as this great natural scene itself is the influence which it exercises upon man. It furnishes a sumptuous feast to his whole being. His eye is delighted with the forms of hill and dale and tree, and with the finely-contrasted

colours of green fields, yellow sand, and dark-blue ocean. His ear is charmed with the melodies of the universe—the murmur of waters, the sighing of the summer woods, and the mingling harmonies of the birds. His sense of smell is regaled with the scent of the moist, green earth, the perfume of flowers, and the balm of the gentle breezes. His higher nature too is stimulated; for, wherever he turns, there are wonders to excite his curiosity, beauties to call into play his fancy and imagination, and evidences of the Divine goodness to awaken the gratitude of his heart.

Here again the two kinds of description—the circumstantial and the picturesque—may be used.

In describing a landscape *circumstantially*, the writer must adopt, to a certain extent, the same order which a painter would take in sketching an exact picture of it. The view-point must first be indicated; the state of the atmosphere must next be noticed; then the outline, or boundary, or shape of the scene must be sketched; and, last of all, the relative positions and forms of the prominent features must be described. The following is a circumstantial description:—

“I am standing on Corstorphine Hill, at the seat called ‘Rest and be thankful,’ and I am looking east towards Edinburgh. It is a moist June evening, about eight o’clock, and the sky is overspread with an ‘under-roof’ of broken gray clouds. My field of view may be

represented as circular, and is bounded on every side by what may be called the different arcs of the circle. The western arc, in the middle of which I am standing, consists of a long stretch of plantation. The northern arc is formed by the broad reach of the Firth of Forth. That on the south is the low, villa-studded slope of Morning-side and Grange, ending abruptly in the lion-like rock of Arthur Seat; and that on the east is a bank of cloud, which is composed of the smoke of Edinburgh and Leith. Running from west to east, like a diameter through this spacious circle, is a broad, undulating ridge. Passing along this, my eye expatiates with pleasure upon fresh pastures, and rows and belts of leafy trees, until it reaches the eastern semicircle; and there is seen the imposing city of Edinburgh, with the mighty mass of the Castle-rock in the middle, and the pillared height of the Calton Hill on the north-east, and stalks, and towers, and spires rising grandly from the vapour."

Scenery, however, is most frequently described in the *picturesque* method. The author, being of a sensitive nature, catches an impression from a scene. Possessed and influenced by this feeling, he dwells only upon those objects which are in unison with it, and produces a picture of which all the details unite in producing one great general effect. A racy example of this may be quoted from Thackeray's *Snob Papers*:—

"We drove by beautiful fresh fields and green hedges, through a cheerful English landscape; the high-road, as smooth and trim as the way in a nobleman's park, was charmingly checkered with cool shade and

golden sunshine. Rustics, in snowy smock-frocks, jerked their hats off, smiling as we passed. Children, with cheeks as red as the apples in the orchards, bobbed curtsies to us at the cottage doors. Blue church-spires rose here and there in the distance; and as the buxom gardener's wife opened the white gate at the Major's little ivy-covered lodge, and we drove through the neat plantations of firs and evergreens up to the house, my bosom felt a joy and elation which I thought it was impossible to experience in the smoky atmosphere of a town."

Here the author is inspired with that holiday feeling so delicious to a worn-out citizen, and therefore he singles out those objects that are peculiar to the country—the fresh fields, the green hedges, the smooth road "charmingly checkered with cool shade and golden sunshine," the "blue church-spires," the ivy-covered lodge, the plantations of firs and evergreens, the "rustics in snowy smock-frocks," and "the children with cheeks as red as the apples in the orchards." He even seizes upon gestures, unpleasing in themselves, but delightful because associated with the country—namely, the "jerking-off of hats," and "the bobbing of curtsies."

If the student wishes to be still further convinced of the necessity of following a plan in such descriptions, let him read the sketches of scenery in third-rate essayists and novelists, and try to resolve any one of them into a picture. Instead of

a kosmos he will find a complete chaos. Instead of delighting his imagination, he will simply confuse and paralyze his understanding. It is with justice, therefore, that Lockhart talks of "the dull, servile fidelity with which so many inferior writers of our time fill in both background and foreground, having no more notion of the perspective of genius than Chinese paper-stainers have of that of the atmosphere, and producing in fact not descriptions but inventories." \*

## STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

There should be nothing more interesting to man than the state of his own mind and heart. Within his soul he carries a marvellous representation of the existing world through which he has passed. What is the brain but an enchanted chamber, whose walls consist of countless sliding panels, on each of which the light, streaming through the windows, paints a living and glowing picture; and no sooner has each panel received its picture than it gives place to another, vanishing, however, only to return again whenever it is required? And what is the heart but a broad and deep fountain, stirred by every change of time and chance, and retaining all these movements and tremors for evermore in its inmost depths? When, therefore, a man acquires the habit of looking within himself,

\* Life of Scott.

he sees many wonderful phenomena; and the longer he looks at them the more wonderful they become.

Literary men, it seems to me, often make a mistake in describing states of mind. They treat the human soul as if it were a curiously-fashioned model, and its faculties as if they were mere dead parts of that model. Instead of the concrete, they use the abstract. Instead of presenting a living and breathing human being, invested with the same circumstances and feelings as ourselves, they bring before us, as it were, a few fragments of a skeleton. These we do not realize as belonging to an individual; we have no sympathy with them; and, therefore, they soon cease to interest us.

To avoid this mistake we would advise students, in describing states of thought and feeling, to employ the *narrative* method. Let them represent some particular individual under certain circumstances, and then let them describe his thoughts and emotions as they arise, just as if they were the different incidents in some important event. The consequence will be, that the reader will follow the ideas with greater interest, and will remember them much more easily. Let us illustrate this by a sketch entitled, *The Feelings of a Literary Devotee in Westminster Abbey* :—

“It was a quiet summer afternoon when I found myself for the first time in the Poets’ Corner, which is, to an imaginative man, perhaps the most hallowed spot on the earth. As I sat there upon the graves and among

the marbled monuments of the illustrious dead, the grand organ began to fill the aisles with its mighty volumes of music; and, as I looked at the statues, I fancied that I saw a wonderful change come over them. Their faces seemed instinct with the loftiest thought and feeling; and it appeared to me as if they were alive, and privileged to remain for ever under these solemn arches and within hearing of that sublime music, secluded from the mean ways and the paltry cares of men, and fixed in ecstatic contemplation. On examining these peculiar feelings I soon traced their rise and progress. The reflection that I was so very near all that remained of the mortal bodies of such men as Johnson, and Garrick, and Macaulay, stirred my whole being. This excitement was intensified by the glorious peals of music which burst forth unexpectedly; and I was elevated into a frame of mind similar to that in which the sculptor was when he moulded these works of art. Thus it was that I was able to appreciate his work, and to see that look of genius which he had impressed upon the dull cold marble."

The student may be apt to think that it will be difficult to find subjects of this kind; but he need be at no loss. There are heart-stirring circumstances which are constantly occurring in the life of every one, and which are well worthy of being studied. He may describe his feelings: *On the Return of Spring; On the Return of Winter; On the Prospect of a Long Holiday; At the Conclusion of a Long Holiday; After Studying a Standard Work; or, After Devouring a Sensational Novel.*



## WORKS OF ART.

Artists are generally the best students of the aspects of the outer world. They have watched Nature carefully in all her moods; they have caught her most prominent features; and they have learned to represent her in the most striking manner. If the composer, therefore, can study thoroughly the masterpieces of painting and sculpture—if he can teach himself to understand and appreciate them—he will acquire a skill analogous to that of the artist: he will, in other words, be able to look at objects, and to represent them from an artistic, or pictorial, or picturesque, point of view.

That this will be the result may be proved from a passage in Goethe's *Autobiography*. That great German poet, when a student, was on a visit to Dresden. He had spent the whole day at the picture-galleries in lingering over his favourite paintings, and he was returning home, when the familiar scene at his humble lodging presented itself to him in an unwonted aspect. "I fancied I saw before me a picture by Ostade, so perfect that I could have hung it up in the gallery. The position of the objects, the light, the shadow, the brownish tint of the whole, the magical keeping—everything that one admires in those pictures—I here saw in reality."

Accordingly, I would advise the student of composition to study both statues and pictures.

At first sight it may seem that the picturesque plan is the one we should use in describing statues and pictures; but a second thought will show us that, in most cases, this is not necessary. It is true that the artist takes a picturesque view of his subject; but that is the very reason why we should take a *circumstantial* view. Having taken a picturesque view, he has represented those features only that are striking and harmonious; and we must, if possible, describe every one of them circumstantially.

In detailing the particulars of a statue, we should follow the most natural order. We should mention, in succession, the site, the material, the attitude, the dress, the countenance, and the expression of the whole. Take the following sketch as an example:—

“The statue of Professor Wilson in Edinburgh is situated in East Princes Street Gardens, a little to the west of the magnificent Scott Monument, and looking northwards upon one of the grandest promenades in the world. It is composed of bronze, which has been toned down by the weather into a dark colour. The distinguished Professor is represented in an erect and commanding attitude. His left foot is slightly advanced; his left hand hangs by his side, leaning on the stump of a palm-tree, and holding a manuscript; his right hand, which holds a pen and at the same time a fold of

his plaid, rests on his breast; and his head is slightly raised, with its long and thick locks thrown backwards. He is clad in the ordinary costume of a gentleman of his time, with a broad plaid thrown negligently over his left arm and shoulder, and falling in ample folds on the ground behind. Every detail is strikingly indicative of the varied character of the man. The well-developed limbs, the stately figure, the Herculean shoulders, and the strong poise of the head, all speak of the athlete, the sportsman, and the robust explorer of Nature's romantic scenery; while the author of genius is seen in the pen and manuscript, in the finely-formed mouth and nostrils, in the spacious forehead, and in the rapt expression of the noble countenance."

In describing a complicated picture, it is, of course, impossible to convert into words those many exquisite graces of form, colour, expression, and light and shadow, which the brush of the artist has achieved; but if we follow the proper plan, we shall be able to indicate the outline with tolerable clearness. We should, first of all, state generally where the scene is laid. Then we should describe the principal figure. We should next pass on to the other objects in the order of their nearness to that figure. Above all, we should be careful to indicate the exact relative position of each object by using the words, "foreground," "background," "right," and "left." And after this circumstantial description we should give life and unity to the whole, by running rapidly over those details

which produce the general effect intended by the artist.

As a specimen, let us take the following rough description of the well-known picture, "Coming of Age in the Olden Time":—

"The scene is the court-yard of a country mansion, old and picturesque, with twisted chimneys and numerous gables, latticed windows, and ivy creeping up the walls. In the foreground, to the right, and on the steps before the door, is the chief figure—the young squire, who has just reached his majority. There he stands bareheaded, handsome, and with a face lit up by visions only of the future. Near him sits his mother, a striking contrast, with eyes brimful of thoughts of the past. Immediately behind him, hand in hand, are a happy couple, who seem to be his sister and her betrothed. Before him, at the foot of the steps, is a rustic group, consisting of a spectacled old gentleman, pompously reading an address of congratulation; a humble follower, kneeling on one knee and presenting a plumed helmet; a boy, having a falcon perched on his right hand, and with his left holding two hounds in leash; and an aged yeoman, surrounded by his well-favoured family, all bearing gifts. On the left side of the foreground two spongy-looking servitors are dispensing the contents of a large cask of beer, and have tested its quality so thoroughly that they are becoming somewhat oblivious, and are allowing the tankard under the tap to overflow. Behind them is an ox roasted whole, with an anxious carver making a wide gash in its side, and two worn-out serving-men, with plates in their hands, waiting to serve out the beef

to the guests. In the background, stretching across the whole breadth of the court, is a table, at which tenants, young and old, male and female, and even casual tramps and mountebanks, are represented as feasting at the expense of the young heir. Seen through the archway, and on the outside of the yard, are two vagrants making a bear dance for the amusement of a small knot of spectators; while beyond, and running into the distance until it seems to touch the sky, is an avenue of grand old trees. Every detail in the picture—the bear dancing, the free-handed feasting, the presents, the bright, well-favoured English faces, and, above all, the young heir, so handsome, so elegantly attired, so like a darling of fortune—all betoken the joyous festivities of the olden time."

When the details are very few, and the subject is treated in a broad style, the description of the picture is comparatively easy. What, for example, could be simpler than Tennyson's sketch of the pictures on the arras in the *Palace of Art* :—

"One seemed all dark and red—a tract of sand,  
And some one pacing there alone,  
Who paced for ever in a glimmering land,  
Lit with a low, large moon.

And one, the reapers at their sultry toil.  
In front they bound the sheaves. Behind  
Were realms of upland, prodigal in oil,  
And hoary to the wind.

And one, a foreground black with stones and slags;  
Beyond, a line of heights; and higher,

All barred with long white cloud, the scornful crags;  
And highest, snow and fire."

Sometimes, however, as may easily be imagined, the *picturesque* method is adopted. Christopher North, for example, is gazing with admiration upon the portrait of Wordsworth. He pronounces it to be the face of a poet; and he dwells fondly upon those features alone that are poetical:—

"How placid and profound the expression of the whole bard! The face is Miltonic even to the very eyes; for though, thank Heaven, they are not blind, there is a dimness about the orbs. The temples, I remember, shaded with thin hair of an indescribable colour, that, in the sunlight, seemed a kind of mild auburn; but now they are bare, and—nothing to break it—the height is majestic. No furrows—no wrinkles on that contemplative forehead—the sky is without a cloud—

'The image of a poet's soul,

How calm, how tranquil, how serene!'

It faintly smiles. There is light and motion round the lips, as if they were about to discourse most eloquent music. In my imagination, that mouth is never mute. I hear it

'Murmuring by the living brooks

A music sweeter than their own.' " \*

Such are the chief kinds of subjects which the student may be called upon in actual life to describe. Of course there are many other objects

\* Noctes Ambrosianæ, vol. iii. p. 353.

well worthy of note, such as the countless animals, vegetables, and minerals in nature, and the many mechanisms and fabrics of man; but after the learner has gone conscientiously and systematically through the course of study which we have laid down in this chapter, he will find little difficulty in describing any of these.

We would especially recommend the student to take walks or excursions into the country, for the purpose of observing and describing any objects that may seem worthy of his notice. If he has a love for science, he may give an account of many interesting natural phenomena. If he has a literary turn, he may note accurately all the sights and sounds of the country, and write an essay introducing all the different kinds of sketches from observation.

## CHAPTER III.

## READING.

Reading an Art—Imagination the chief Faculty employed in it  
 —Three Powers of this Faculty, all requiring to be cultivated—Accurate Representation—Generalizing Representation—Creative Representation.

IN bygone times, in certain parts of the country, a poor priest had a certain right called *Whittlegate*, that is to say, he had the privilege of wielding his whittle or knife at any dinner-table in the parish. We can imagine it to have been a very consolatory privilege. Very likely he had begun his career, like most romantic young men, with a spirit of sturdy independence, and with a resolve to eat nothing which he had not earned. He existed, therefore, on pulse and water for many a day; and though he was healthy enough, yet his friends remarked that he was deplorably lank and lean. At length he bethought him of his unemployed right of *whittlegate*; and, sharpening his knife, he dropped in at dinner-time upon some Epicurean franklin, whose table was groaning beneath smoking sirloins and flagons of old wine. His experience there was so highly satisfactory that he



resolved to continue it. So, henceforth his life was a prolonged feast-day. His time was occupied in walking gaily from banqueting-hall to banqueting-hall; he breathed in a savoury atmosphere; and his spare frame gradually but surely developed into a person robust and rubicund.

The student of composition is like this poor priest. He has faithfully exercised his powers of observation; he has gathered all the knowledge he can get from the narrow circle of his everyday life; and he feels that his mental wants are not thoroughly satisfied. Yet he has a literary *whittle-gate*—a right to partake of the feast prepared by his superiors. He can banquet with the great authors. He can imbibe their deep feelings and their lofty ideas until he feels his sympathies intensified, his mind strengthened, and his whole being dilated.

He *can* do it—he has the power—but how seldom does he exercise the power! How few readers use properly the rich treasures of our literature! The majority of professed students are ignorant of the proper method of consulting books. They fail to place themselves at the standpoint of the author—to grasp his plan, to view the details in relation to the whole, to master the thoughts, to recast these thoughts in their own minds, and to convert them into the substance of their own thinking. The mere print of the book seems to bewitch, and

trammel, and lead them astray. The words and not the ideas—the letter and not the spirit—are the object of their study; and when they quote, they produce, not the full and fair sense of the writer, but detached words and sentences. Hence, to see two rival authors interpreting each other's meaning properly, would be one of the greatest wonders of the world. We find them invariably accusing each other of wrong constructions, garbling of sentences, wresting of texts, and general falsification.

Now, in the present age, when our intellectual wealth, laid up in the treasuries of books, is so overwhelming, it is perfectly necessary that learners should be taught how to use it. The proper method of consulting books should be made a special study; and this, accordingly, we proceed to do.

The process by which we make other men's ideas our own is very wonderful. In our ordinary walk through life we receive many vivid impressions of objects; and these impressions or images we store away in our memory. They may seem to be overwhelmed and destroyed by the flood of ideas that is ceaselessly pouring into our minds; but still they are not lost, and are ready to start up whenever they are wanted. The delicate mental pictures may appear to have vanished; but they have, as it were, been printed in invisible ink, and, when subjected to the heat of an excited imagination,

they will come out with sufficient clearness and distinctness. They have, indeed, been changed into the very substance of the mind ; and though they may long lie dormant, they will start into activity when the proper moment comes. Accordingly, if we look intently into our own minds while we are reading, we shall witness a process like that of creation going on. The sound of each word or phrase acts like a charm ; and the image with which it has been associated is conjured up from the abysses of memory, and stands visibly before us. As we read on, other images continue to rise ; and, when the passage is graphic, the whole form a complete group. If we have been listless and superficial observers, the figures are as wavering and undefined as wreaths of vapour. But if we have observed carefully and intently, they are steady and distinct, and present an impressive picture. At first we are prone to think the phenomena entirely new ; but on examination we find that the component parts have all been in our minds before, and that it is only the combination that is original. As an example let us take the following lines from Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* ; and let us intently watch each image as it passes in the mind :—

“ Where icicles hang by the wall,  
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,  
And Tom bears logs into the hall,  
And milk comes frozen home in pail,

When blood is nipped, and ways be foul,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,

To-who :

To-whit, to-who, a merry note,  
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot."

In this instance, as there successively rise before our view the figures of icicles hanging by the eaves, a rustic bumpkin blowing the tips of his fingers, a man-servant carrying an armful of fire-wood, a pail full of frozen milk, a wide-awake owl uttering his weird note, and a dirty servant-wench skimming a steaming pot, we recognise objects which we have actually seen; and we find that the only thing new is their combination, forming, as it does, a vivid picture of a winter evening in a snug farm-kitchen in the days of Elizabeth.

The wonderful faculty which enables us thus to realize other men's thoughts, to enlarge our experience almost immeasurably, and to widen immensely, as it were, our very being, we shall call by the not very philosophical, but very convenient name of Imagination. Its great functions are three. In the first place, it may simply give all the ideas of the author just as *he* gave them; in the second place, it may subtract some, keeping the others as being suited for a certain purpose; and, in the third place, it may add some, thus filling up the rough sketch given by the writer. For want of better names, we shall call the first function *accurate representation*; the second, *general-*

*izing representation*; and the third, *creative representation*. And to show how important it is to cultivate these, we need only state that the neglect of them is the cause of almost all the mistakes of critics, commentators, and lecturers. By neglecting the first, they twist and garble and falsify the sense; by neglecting the second, they become prolix, confused, and intolerable; and by neglecting the third, they grow meagre, dry, and lifeless.

Let us now consider by what means these three powers may be cultivated.

#### ACCURATE REPRESENTATION.

This, which is just a mode of telling the truth, and which should be made a matter of conscience by every author, is sadly overlooked. The cause of the fault differs in different cases. In some it is dulness, in others carelessness, and in many love of effect. But in all the result is baneful. The most glaring instance of this literary lying occurs in connexion with the history of the early church. If there was an author at the end of the first century, who, by reason of honesty, knowledge of human nature, and power of expression, was fitted to give a true account of any doctrine, that author was Tacitus. Yet what an unutterably false view does he give of that divine message which was then beginning to dispel the darkness and misery of the world:—

“So, for the quieting of this rumour, Nero judicially

charged with the crime, and punished with most studied severities, that class, hated for their general wickedness, whom the vulgar called *Christians*. The originator of that name was one *Christ*, who, in the reign of Tiberius, suffered death by sentence of the Procurator Pontius Pilate. The baneful superstition, thereby repressed for the time, again broke out not only over Judea, the native soil of that mischief, but in the city also, where from every side all atrocious and abominable things collect and flourish.”\*

To acquire the habit of correct representation the student should learn to concentrate all his attention upon what he hears or reads. He should shut himself in completely from all other ideas, and be alone with the subject on hand. His mind should be like the camera obscura—entirely closed and impervious to light on every side save one. And while he reads or listens, he should endeavour to think as little of the words as possible; and his imagination should be working actively to make each image, as it rises, definite and clear. If any of the thoughts are confused and obscure, let him stop and take them to pieces, and study each part by itself. If any of the images are hazy and formless, let his mind return upon them and dwell upon them, and he will find that an intelligent gaze, like the morning sun of summer, will soon dispel the mists and make the objects stand out in

\* Tacitus's *Annals*, xv. 44; Carlyle's translation of the passage.

clear outline. In this way he will make the ideas entirely his own; he will no longer think of them as belonging to the author from whom he has borrowed them; and when he expresses them he will use his own words.

In this part of instruction the teacher of composition would require to be very particular. In the course of his private readings, let him be always on the search for those descriptions of events and scenes, where the ideas are so important and striking that the language sinks under them, as it were, and is virtually overlooked. He may choose such passages, for example, as the first meeting of Boswell and Johnson in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, or Scott's sight of Burns in Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. He will also light upon many specimens of this kind in authors who, like Defoe, Swift, and Addison, bring forward forcible thoughts in the clearest and most natural style. Having chosen such a passage for a lesson, and calling upon his pupils to stir up their minds to catch ideas and not words, let him read it aloud to them once, and only once. Let him, at the same time, tell them that what he wishes them to do is to give, not the author's language, but his sense,—not a few ideas picked out and altered so as to produce an effect, but all the ideas, and nothing but the ideas; and when the exercises have been written and examined, let him ascribe the highest merit to the most complete and most accurate representation.

## GENERAL REPRESENTATION.

A story is told of a young spendthrift, with far more money than brains, who, in a mad frolic, bought up all the stock of a row of shops. The purchase was sent home ; and when he was built in, and almost buried, with piles of goods of every kind, he found that what might have been useful to others, was an insufferable encumbrance and even nuisance to him. Like this is the case of many an ardent student. Aiming at universal knowledge, he seizes upon every book that falls in his way, wades laboriously through all its details, and strives to cram them into his memory. The result is, that his mind is borne down and paralyzed with the very abundance of its information ; and he soon degenerates into the character described with such alliterative force by Pope :—

“ The bookful blockhead ignorantly read  
With loads of learned lumber in his head.”

A wise student, on the other hand, never makes such a mistake. He recognises the great truth that the business of the memory is not only to remember but to forget, and that, in order to remember one fact that is important, it is necessary to forget many that are unimportant. Accordingly he never aims at universal knowledge. While he carefully masters all the details of those works that suit his capacity, he contents himself with a general out-



line of any work that is not so suitable. This outline or plan he carries conveniently in his memory, and keeps for future use. In it he has the essence of the book—the embryo—the form which it first took in its author's mind ; and should occasion call, and circumstances be favourable, he can extend and develop it into something like the original. Very much in this manner does the scientific explorer act, who, upon a foreign shore, discovers some strange and rare trees. He does not dig them up and export them to his own land with infinite toil and cost. He merely gathers a few of their seeds and puts them in a small packet. Then, wrapped up within these few little grains, he has the embryo stems, branches, and leaves of the plants ; and should he ever wish to cultivate them, he can make them shoot up and expand into the likeness of their parent trees.

This is a mental habit in which every teacher of composition must see the necessity of training his scholars. He should impress upon them the great truth that mere stray facts will drop away altogether from the mind, that it is only a connected whole that will fix itself in the memory, and that we cannot remember a book unless we have a clear idea from beginning to end of its plan or method. And in prescribing exercises he should never be at a loss. Each reign in history, each country in geography, each play or other classical work which has recently been studied, will furnish an admirable

subject ; and he should see that, in executing such a task, his pupils distinguish the important details from the unimportant, that they choose the former only, and that they describe them in a clear, connected, and interesting way. For the sake of variety, he should also occasionally ask them to read at their leisure some standard work, such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim*, or Addison's *Sir Roger de Coverley*, or one of Macaulay's *Essays*, and to write a lively summary of it. Nor should the student (if he is at all worthy of the name) rest satisfied with the instructions of a master. He should train himself in private, and actually make a lesson of every book he takes up. If he has time to peruse the work thoroughly, he can note all the necessary facts and features as he goes along. If he has not time to peruse it, he can, by carefully reading the preface and consulting the table of contents, gather the general purpose and plan of the volume. But in whichever way he treats it, let him write down a clear outline of it in his commonplace-book ; and thus he will not only train his mind to represent other men's thoughts accurately, but he will preserve a small model of every book he reads.

At this stage we must emphatically warn the student against supposing that a summary must of necessity be dull and dry. It may be concise, and yet full of pith and point. As a proof of this we shall give an example.

In 1521, at the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther

had appeared before a brilliant assembly, consisting of an emperor, princes, barons, bishops, and dignitaries innumerable, and, in reply to a charge of heresy, had made a long oration, defending his doctrines, and declaring that, unless disproved from Scripture, he could not retract. Some days afterwards, writing to his friend Lucas Cranach, the painter, he gives, in a few abrupt sentences, the narrative of the whole proceedings :—

“Your servant, dear Gossip Lucas. I thought his majesty would have assembled at Worms some fifty doctors to convict the monk outright. But not at all. —Are these your books?—Yes!—Will you retract them? —No!—Well! then begone!—There’s the whole history.”\*

There is another important kind of generalizing representation. It consists in representing, not the whole outline or plan of a book, but some particular feature or class of ideas. It would be wrong to call it garbling or mangling the work; for the student does not pretend to represent the whole but only a special part. It is one of the arts of a consummate literary adept—one of the tricks of the trade, if we may so speak; and it is a most interesting sight to see such an adept at work. With what a critical air he takes up the book and opens it! With what a searching glance he ex-

\* D'Aubigné's History of the Reformation, book 7, chap. xi.

plores the table of contents! How nimbly he turns over the leaves! With what an unerring aim he pounces upon the passages he wants! And how cleverly he adapts them to his own purposes! He is, indeed, like a skilful musician, and can call forth from an instrument any tune he pleases. In this art, as in all other intellectual exercises, Gibbon, the historian, was a great proficient. When he wished information on any particular subject, he first wrote down all that he already knew about it. Having thus found out what his deficiencies were, or, in other words, what facts he wanted, he began to manipulate his immense library in a most masterly style. He took down one authority, and, having found the facts that he wanted, laid it open upon the table. He did the same with another; and went on in this manner until there were perhaps thirty or forty volumes lying open before him. Then he was seen glancing successively at them all—in fact, reading all the forty at once; and as he read, it was evident that his fervid imagination was actively engaged, on the spot, in welding all the varied information into one consistent whole, and resolving it into one of those glowing pictures with which he was wont to charm the world.

A happy instance of an author merely selecting one feature of a book, is seen in Thackeray's treatment of *Ten Thousand a Year*. Ordinary readers find in that well-known novel many passages of

deep pathos and high sentiment; but Thackeray looks only at its ridiculous side:—

“ In that noble romance called *Ten Thousand a Year*, I remember a profoundly pathetic description of the Christian manner in which the hero, Mr Aubrey, bore his misfortunes. After making a display of the most florid and grandiloquent resignation, and quitting his country mansion, the writer supposes Aubrey to come to town in a post-chaise and pair, sitting bodkin probably between his wife and sister. It is about seven o'clock; carriages are rattling about, knockers are thundering, and tears bedim the fine eyes of Kate and Mrs Aubrey, as they think that, in happier times, at this hour, their Aubrey used formerly to go out to dinner to the houses of his aristocratic friends. This is the gist of the passage—the elegant words I forget; but the noble, noble sentiment I shall always cherish and remember. What can be more sublime than the notion of a great man's relatives in tears about—his dinner? With a few touches, what author ever more happily described a snob? ”

In this kind of generalizing representation also the young student should be trained. There need be no difficulty in hitting upon subjects for exercises. His lessons in other branches will supply these. Let him trace out and describe some beauty or blemish in a classical work, some characteristic in the life of a great man, or some peculiar feature in the geography of a country.

## EXERCISES.

1. Give a clear and interesting outline of one or other of the following works: *The Tempest*, *As You Like It*, *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *John Gilpin*.

2. In the following extract from De Quincey, we have the elements of a grand picture buried under many unnecessary explanations. Write a sketch of it in your own words, bringing out the striking effects, and omitting all the petty particulars:—

“ But the night before us is a night of victory; and behold! to the ordinary display, what a heart-shaking addition!—horses, men, carriages, all are dressed in laurels and flowers, oak leaves and ribbons. The guards, as being officially his Majesty’s servants, and of the coachmen such as are within the privilege of the post-office, wear the royal liveries of course; and as it is summer (for all the *land* victories were naturally won in summer) they wear, on this fine evening, these liveries exposed to view, without any covering of upper coats. Such a costume, and the elaborate arrangement of the laurels in their hats, dilate their hearts, by giving to them openly a personal connexion with the great news, in which already they have the general interest of patriotism. That great national sentiment surmounts and quells all sense of ordinary distinctions. Those passengers who are gentlemen are now hardly to be distinguished as such except by dress; for the usual reserve of their manner in speaking to the attendants has on this night melted away. One heart, one pride, one glory, connects every man by the transcendent bond of

his national blood. The spectators, who are numerous beyond precedent, express their sympathy with these fervent feelings by continual hurrahs. Every moment are shouted aloud by the post-office servants, and summoned to draw up, the great ancestral names of cities known to history through a thousand years—Lincoln, Winchester, Portsmouth, Gloucester, Oxford, Bristol, Manchester, York, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Perth, Stirling, Aberdeen—expressing the grandeur of the mail establishment by the diffusive radiation of its separate missions. Every moment you hear the thunder of lids locked down upon the mail-bags. The sound to each individual mail is the signal for drawing off, which process is the finest part of the entire spectacle. Then come the horses into play. Horses! can these be horses that bound off with the action and gesture of leopards! What stir! what sea-like ferment! what a thundering of wheels! what a trampling of hoofs! what a sounding of trumpets! what farewell cheers! what redoubling peals of brotherly congratulation, connecting the name of the particular mail—‘Liverpool for ever!’—with the name of particular victory—‘Badajoz for ever!’ or ‘Salamanca for ever!’ The half-slumbering consciousness that all night long, and all the next day—perhaps even for a longer period—many of these mails, like fire racing along a train of gunpowder, will be kindling, at every instant, new successions of burning joy, has an obscure effect of multiplying the victory itself, by multiplying to the imagination into infinity the stages of its progressive diffusion. A fiery arrow seems to be let loose, which from that moment is destined to travel, without intermission, westwards for three hun-

dred miles, northwards for six hundred, and the sympathy of our Lombard Street friends at parting is exalted a hundredfold by a sort of visionary sympathy with the yet slumbering sympathies, which, in so vast a succession, we are going to awake.

"Liberated from the embarrassments of the city, and issuing into the broad uncrowded avenues of the northern suburbs, we soon begin to enter upon our natural pace of ten miles an hour. In the broad light of the summer evening, the sun perhaps only just at the point of setting, we are seen from every story of every house. Heads of every age crowd to the windows—young and old understand the language of our victorious symbols; and rolling volleys of sympathizing cheers run along us, behind us, and before us. The beggar, rearing himself against the wall, forgets his lameness, real or assumed, thinks not of his whining trade, but stands erect with bold exulting smiles, as we pass him. The victory has healed him, and says, Be thou whole! Women and children, from garrets alike and cellars, through infinite London, look down or look up, with loving eyes, upon our gay ribbons and our martial laurels; sometimes kiss their hands; sometimes hang out, as signals of affection, pocket-handkerchiefs, aprons, dusters—anything that, by catching the summer breezes, will express an aerial jubilation."

#### CREATIVE REPRESENTATION.

We must not be misled by the word *creative*. To *create* does not mean in this instance to make



out of nothing. We cannot create individual images: we can only arrange them into new groups: we can only create mere combinations of images.

This creative representation is not the faculty of the poet alone. Every student who is really worthy of the name possesses it. He knows that authors on many occasions give only an outline of a scene, and that he himself must fill it up and complete the picture. Let us suppose, for instance, that he is reading the following passage in Genesis :—

“ And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the eye or good for food.”

He is not content with this general description; but he gathers from the stores of his memory all the delightful plants he has ever perceived—the graceful trees, the radiant flowers, and the luscious fruits; and he groups them all into a rich and variegated paradise. It is only in this way, by developing and extending an idea, that a man can be said to appropriate knowledge. By spending his mental strength upon it, and adding to it in order to suit his own purpose, he may be said to make it his own. It is only in this way, too, that an idea can be kept long in the memory. Knowledge is like a plant. If, after it has been transplanted into a new soil, it does not send forth shoots and develop itself into full growth, it is no longer a living tree but a dead stick. It may be-

come useful by rotting away and forming compost for other plants; but as a palpable entity it will soon vanish.

But at this point a danger arises. In supplementing an author's ideas we are apt to carry them out to an extent which he never intended, and thus to distort his views. The question therefore occurs: How can we avoid misrepresentation? When a man misrepresents his neighbour, his neighbour is almost certain to say to him, "Now, put yourself in my position." This is exactly the advice that I give to the student who is consulting an author. Put yourself in the author's position. Place yourself at his standpoint; invest yourself with his feelings and sentiments; and look as it were through his eyes. You will then see, not only what he has put into the sketch, but also what he has found it necessary to leave out. You will thus be able to fill up and complete the picture in a style quite in keeping with the original outline.

Of this art Carlyle is one of the greatest masters; and it is in a great measure to his matchless power in practising it, that he owes his lofty eminence as a biographer and historian. What to other readers are mere historical names, or at the best historical ghosts flitting through the dim abyss of the past, are to him living men. He delights to clothe these spectres with bones and flesh and blood, with warm human feelings, with

familiar human garments, and to present them to us as real fellow-mortals, and therefore worthy of our deepest interest and sympathy. For example, while he is reading in Clarendon's *History* an account of the Royal Flight from Worcester, he comes to that passage which states, that Charles and Squire Careless "came to a poor cottage, the owner whereof being a Roman Catholic was known to Careless," that this man "carried them into a little barn full of hay," and brought them "a piece of bread and a great pot of butter-milk, and that he exchanged clothes, down to the very shoes, with the king." No sooner has he read this than he enters thoroughly into the spirit of the scene; and out of this dim, cold outline, by means of the warm tints of his imagination, he forms a complete and life-like picture:—

"This, then," he says, "was a genuine flesh-and-blood rustic of the year 1651: he did actually swallow bread and butter-milk (not having ale and bacon), and do field-labour: with these hob-nailed 'shoes' had sprawled through mud-roads in winter, and, jocund or not, driven his team afield in summer: he made bargains, had chafferings and higgings, now a sore heart, now a glad one; was born, was a son, was a father; toiled in many ways, being forced to it, till the strength was all worn out of him: and then—lay down 'to rest his galled back,' and sleep there till the long distant morning."

At this point, however, objectors may interpose.

We can fancy we hear them saying : "This is all very true ; but this creative representation is the faculty of the literary adept alone. It serves no purpose to call upon young people to exert their imagination. The most of them have exceedingly little imagination ; and that little they are very loath to use. How, then, in training this weak and sluggish power, will you find exercises simple enough ?" To these objections we would reply as follows : " In everyday affairs there is no difficulty in rousing that faculty. Describe to a young person some interesting scene that is going on, and tell him that you will take him to witness it. Immediately his imagination is roused into play, and in spirit he is already there. And why should the case be different in composition ? Read aloud to a class of students some graphic extract, such as the description of a battle, or of some notable man, or of the scenery of a country. Return upon the chief details again and again. By the aid of intonation, of facial expression, and even, if need be, of gesture, represent the facts vividly, until you see from the look of their eyes that their fancy is at work, and that they feel themselves in the heart of the scene. Then tell them to make this passage the subject of an imaginary description. Let them, in fact, suppose themselves present at the battle, or paying a visit to the great man, or taking a jaunt through the country, and let them describe what they thus, with their fancy's eye,

observe. You will then find that they will not only represent the real facts very clearly, but that they will have little difficulty in filling up the picture with imaginary incidents."

#### EXERCISES.

1. Describe an imaginary journey through England, Scotland, or any other country; giving a general account of the surface, climate, productions, and people of the land, and introducing some interesting incident by the way.

2. Let the student suppose himself a soldier at the battle of Prestonpans. Let him describe, using the first person, the position and appearance of the armies, the great movements and result of the battle, and his own feelings and hairbreadth escapes.

3. Describe an imaginary visit to Dr Johnson, at his house in Bolt Court; sketching his figure, his attire, his uncouth manners, and his style of conversation.

4. Try to picture and *expand* the following scene the little hamlet at the foot of the hill as it appeared on the 18th of June 1488, its group of thatched houses, its mill, its mill-dam, the midsummer weather, the poor woman drawing water, and her feelings when she saw an armed soldier come galloping down the hill:—

"Surrounded by sights and sounds to which he was so little accustomed, James lost his remaining presence of mind, and, turning his back, fled towards Stirling. But he was unable to manage the gray horse given him by Lord Lindsay, which, taking the bit in his teeth, ran full gallop down the hill into a little hamlet, where

was a mill called Beaton's Mill. A woman had come out to draw water at the mill-dam, but, terrified at seeing a man in complete armour coming down towards her at full speed, she left her pitcher and fled back into the mill. The sight of the pitcher frightened the king's horse, so that he swerved as he was about to leap the brook, and James, losing his seat, fell to the ground, where, being heavily armed and sorely bruised, he remained motionless." \*

\* Tales of a Grandfather.

## CHAPTER IV.

### STYLE.

Proper Method of Criticising and Imitating great Authors—  
Their chief Characteristics—A Wide Sympathy—Complete  
View—Method—Abandonment—Graphic Expression—Mas-  
terly Use of Figurative Language—Power of making Com-  
mon Things Interesting.

WE shall take it for granted that the student has reached a certain stage in the study of composition. We shall suppose that he has undergone a rigid course of studies from nature and books ; and that he has trained himself to describe accurately what he perceives and imagines. If such be the case, he has gained, not only a certain accuracy of thought and expression, but an advantage equally great—namely, a knowledge of his own shortcomings. He feels that there are certain subjects that he cannot master, and certain phases of meaning which he cannot express. He also feels that there is a certain roughness, a certain want of melody, both in his phrases and sentences, which he knows not how to amend. And this feeling, though painful, is a most healthy symptom. It shows that he has learned all that can be learned

directly from nature, and that he is ready to receive the instructions of art; that he has exhausted all the resources of *ordinary expression*, and that he is now prepared to acquire the power of *literary expression*. Accordingly, the great question now is, How can this power of literary expression be gained?

How did we acquire the power of *ordinary expression*? Simply by listening attentively to our friends, and imitating them. And how can we acquire the art of *literary expression*? By studying the best authors, and trying to imitate them. But in doing so, let us avoid the mistake into which so many students fall. Let us beware of slavishly copying the petty idiosyncrasies of some favourite author—those little peculiarities which are the result of some twist in his constitution—for in this way we shall simply make ourselves ridiculous. Let us rather devote our attention to those high qualities which arise from the very nature of great minds, and which are therefore common to all our first writers. And, in doing so, we shall adopt a style of criticism somewhat new. We shall not criticise books in the form in which they appear after they are finished—we shall rather criticise them while they are in the process of being composed. We shall not examine the works of great authors, so much as great authors themselves at their work. By the aid of imagination we shall watch those mighty men of literature



in the act of composition, and shall scrutinize in turn each of those grand mental movements which produce the masterpieces of our language.

What are the qualities which great authors show in the treatment of any subject? They are, we think, a wide sympathy, a complete view, a natural method, a thorough abandonment, a graphic expression, a masterly use of figurative language, and the power of making the commonest things interesting.

In connexion with these studies two kinds of exercises may be given. We shall call them *critical* and *imitative*.

After the scholars have mastered a section, a passage noted for the literary merit in question will be prescribed, and they will be asked to write a *critical* paper, showing that the passage is characterized by that particular merit.

A still more useful kind of exercise will be the *imitative*. The teacher will prescribe merely the bare outlines of the passage, and the students will expand them into a full description. The teacher will then read the original passage, and the students will see by contrast their own literary shortcomings.

#### A WIDE SYMPATHY.

A wide sympathy is the very foundation of literary excellence. "Love," says an old proverb, "is the beginning of all knowledge." It quick-

ens every faculty both of mind and heart. If we love a person it is astonishing how soon we discover all his gifts and graces. Accordingly, love or sympathy is the very groundwork of a great author's nature. He is not a cold-blooded solitary, keeping himself cooped up in his study, and wearing his eyes out, and his life away, in poring over miserable books. He is a breather of the open air, a frequenter of highways and streets, a hearty, thoroughgoing man of the world. He takes a keen interest in every object—the blue sky, the green earth, the busy city, the faces of men, and everything, in fact, connected with mankind. He exclaims, with Wordsworth—

“Long have I loved what I behold,  
The night that calms, the day that cheers.  
The common growth of mother earth  
Sufficeth me, her tears and mirth,  
Her sweetest mirth and tears.

The dragon's wing, the magic ring,  
I shall not covet for my dower,  
If I along that lonely way  
With sympathetic heart may stray,  
And with a soul of power.”

And with Milton, he prizes highly—

“Day, or the sweet approach of even, or morn,  
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,  
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine.”

There is not an object in which he does not take

an interest, and from which he cannot draw intellectual nourishment. Therefore, he carries within him a picture of the world, with all its diverse scenes, forms, and opinions. He is like, in fact, some vigorous and radiant plant that has sprung up and been nurtured in the open air. He is instinct with the strength, the freshness, and the joyous sunlight of nature. And when he begins to write, this sympathy has a wonderful practical result. Knowing so intimately the tastes and feelings of his fellow-men, he is able to bring forward those ideas which will enlighten their understandings and touch their hearts.

This quality was remarkably embodied in Sir Walter Scott. Fine, healthy sympathy was seen in every feature. It glanced from his clear gray eye; it beamed in his genial smile; it was heard in the strong Scotch burr of his voice; and it even echoed in the firm beat of his stout staff. As he went his rounds at Abbotsford, he had a hearty recognition for every person and every thing. He would loiter to crack a joke with a quarryman, to question a wayside beggar, or to pat a stray dog. "The Shirra," exclaimed an enthusiastic old woman, "looks upon us a' as his bluid relations;" and she could not have hit off his character more truly. Equally strong was his relish for the things of the past. There was not a ruined castle or mouldering peel whose history, real or imaginary, he did not know and did not glory in relating. Its former

inmates—the rugged chiefs, the ragged retainers, the high-spirited ladies, the grotesque dwarfs—were all as familiar to him as the persons he met every day. They rose before him in his daily walks ; and his tongue never tired of rolling forth those soul-stirring ballads which tell of their romantic adventures. His sympathy, “as broad and general as the casing air,” took in every object, and never afterwards let it go. And thus it was, that, while his neighbours fancied he was doing nothing, he was throwing off those life-like representations which were the wonder of his own time, and which still continue to enchant the world.

## EXERCISES.

1. Write a critical paper on the following extract, showing how a wide sympathy with nature led the author to study and describe accurately the most commonplace phenomena, and to produce a complete picture of a sleepy, summer forenoon :—

“The daw,

The rook, and magpie, to the gray-grown oaks,  
That the calm village in their verdant arms,  
Sheltering, embrace, direct their lazy flight ;  
Where in the mingling boughs they sit embowered  
All the hot noon, till cooler hours arise.  
Faint, underneath, the household fowls convene ;  
And, in a corner of the buzzing shade,  
The house-dog, with the vacant greyhound, lies  
Outstretched and sleepy. In his slumbers, one  
Attacks the midnight thief, and one exults

O'er hill and dale ; till, wakened by the wasp,  
They starting snap. Nor shall the muse disdain  
To let the little noisy summer race  
Live in her lay and flutter through her song ;  
Not mean though simple : to the sun allied,  
From him they draw their animating fire."

2. Washington Irving, in one of his sketches, describes a farm-yard, touching off with the greatest spirit the appearance and movements of the following animals:—Swallows, pigeons, pigs, geese, ducks, turkeys, guinea-fowls, and cocks and hens. Write a paper in imitation, throwing as much spirit and sympathy into it as possible.

3. Carlyle, in his *French Revolution*, sketches a mid-summer evening scene at the village of Sainte-Menehould. He dwells with poetic sympathy upon the following phenomena:—The sun setting and tinging the hills, the note of the thrush, the babble of the brook, the windmill at rest, the attitude of the villagers in the street, and the pranks of the children. Write a passage in imitation.

#### A COMPLETE VIEW.

A great author has a large mind, and an insatiable hungering after knowledge. He is not content with those vague notions about a subject that pass current with ordinary men. He must look upon the living subject itself ; he must see it face to face as it exists in nature. Nor does he rest satisfied with viewing a part of it. He never

desists till he has gone round and round it, till he has surveyed all its heights and hollows, all the thoughts and feelings which it suggests—till, in fact, he has taken it in as a whole. Like the mountain eagle, he scorns the confined range and foggy atmosphere of the valley; and, with mighty pinion, he soars aloft, far above the rocky barriers and the mist, and flags not until he folds his wings upon the topmost peak of the mountain. There in the clear sunlight his piercing eye can take a wide survey, and find no bound save the far-distant horizon.

Where shall we find such a wonderful instance of this largeness of vision as in Shakespeare? So wide is the compass of his intellect, that he may be said to embrace in his plays, not only different people, but human nature itself. He represents with the greatest ease all the many grades of society—kings, cardinals, generals, philosophers, merchants, clowns, and murderers. He brings forward every variety of mind, from the very greatest down to the very meanest—from Hamlet, who discusses the highest problems of life, to Caliban, who has the feelings of a brute. He scales every height, and sounds every depth of their different natures, and understands and expresses every turn of thought and change of feeling. So much is this the case, that if any man were priding himself upon having hit on some new sentiment, we would advise him to study Shakespeare's works, and there,

very probably, he would find his discovery expressed with a fulness and felicity which would absolutely defy all competition. It seems as if nature had intended that this extraordinary writer should be the mouthpiece of humanity in all ages to come. Nor is he content with the real world. He soars into ideal regions of his own, peoples them with strange creations—fairies, sprites, ghosts, witches, hobgoblins—and gives to each of these a consistent character and speech.

“Each change of many-coloured life he drew,  
Exhausted worlds, and then imagined new.”

Sometimes an author has some difficulty in gaining a complete view of a subject; yet he seldom rests content till he accomplishes it. Macaulay, before he began his *History of England*, had a large store of accurate historical knowledge. “I wish,” said Lord Melbourne, “that I could be as certain of anything as Tom Macaulay is of everything.” Yet he underwent the most laborious researches to make his information complete. He ransacked libraries of histories filled with a mere jumble of names, piles of blue-books crammed with columns of figures, bundles of moth-eaten newspapers, discoloured and crabbed manuscripts, stupid stories, and doggerel verses. He overturned, as it were, and sifted the rubbish-heaps of the past; and though, as we can imagine, he was almost stifled with the dust, yet he did not stop, until, out of the

confusion, there arose a 'complete picture of England in the time of the Stuarts, and he saw moorland and fens occupying half of the open country, wild bulls with white manes roaming through the forest, paltry towns standing where flourishing cities now stand, and the narrow streets of London, where powdered ladies were borne along in sedan-chairs, and where fops in large flaxen wigs were mincing their way to the coffeehouses.\*

Sometimes a great author treats a subject shortly; yet his description is not on that account incomplete. In little more than a page, Lord Bacon writes a comprehensive essay on *Studies*. He tells of what use studies are, in what light they are regarded by different men, how they should be prosecuted, and for what kind of mind each of them is suited. The whole article is a miniature, where all the great characteristic features are accurately sketched by a few decisive touches. Almost every sentence is instinct with meaning, and contains the substance of a system, just as every acorn is said to contain within its husk the enormous bole and far-spreading branches of a full-grown oak. Take, for instance, the following

\* It is needless to say that it is quite possible to be too minute in studying a subject. Erasmus, in his *Praise of Folly*, mentions a scholar, "a Grecian, a Latinist, a mathematician, a philosopher, a musician, who devoted the last twenty years of his life to mastering the eight parts of speech, and who prayed fervently every day that his life might be spared until he had done it."



advice about the method of reading:—"Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider." Could a volume say more?

#### EXERCISES.

1. Criticise the following passage from Bacon's *Essays*, and, after putting the meaning shortly in your own words, show how it treats of all the aspects of the subject:—

##### "OF EXPENSE.

"Riches are for spending, and spending for honour and good actions. Therefore extraordinary expense must be limited by the worth of the occasion; for voluntary undoing may be as well for a man's country as for the kingdom of heaven. But ordinary expense ought to be limited by a man's estate, and governed with such regard as it be within his compass; and not subject to deceit and abuse of servants; and ordered to the best show, that the bills may be less than the estimation abroad. Certainly, if a man will keep but of even hand, his ordinary expenses ought to be but to the half of his receipts; and if he think to wax rich, but to the third part. It is no baseness for the greatest to descend and look into their own estate. Some forbear it, not upon negligence alone, but doubting to bring themselves into melancholy in respect they shall find it broken: but wounds cannot be cured without searching. He that cannot look into his own estate himself, had need both choose well those whom he employeth, and change them often; for new men are more timorous and less subtle. He that can look into his estate but

seldom, it behoveth him to turn all to certainties. A man had need, if he be plentiful in some kind of expense, to be as saving again in some others: as, if he be plentiful in diet, to be saving in apparel; if he be plentiful in the hall, to be saving in the stable, and the like; for he that is plentiful in expenses of all kinds, will hardly be preserved from decay."

2. Let the student suppose that he is called upon to give an account of the social condition of England during the latter half of the seventeenth century; and let him draw up a table of the different features of the country and of society which he would require to describe.

3. Macaulay in the first volume of his *History*, mentions the degraded condition of the young Levite or chaplain in a country gentleman's family. He might have merely given a general description; but he fills up the details of the picture from his own imagination, and describes the poor man as going through various menial offices. Write an imitation.

#### A NATURAL METHOD.

Thomas Fuller relates that John Halsebach, a professor at Vienna, began to lecture on the prophet Isaiah. He went on persistently for twenty-one years, and then died; and, after his death, it was discovered that he had not yet finished his remarks on the first chapter! What a mercy it was that this learned commentator existed in these modern ages, when the life of man is limited to

threescore years and ten. Had he flourished in antediluvian times, the world would have been swamped with another flood—a flood of dreary maundering commonplaces, explaining and illustrating nothing in particular. There are many writers like this absurd professor. They are mentally blind, and at the same time they cannot distinguish between small and great. Accordingly, when describing any scene, they grope about at the mercy of chance, they seize any detail whatever that comes to hand, and, of course, they soon lose themselves in hopeless confusion. But a great author never falls into this mistake. It may safely be asserted that in every description of any importance he follows a method. This method is different in different instances. When the objects are few and all equally important, he describes them in the order in which they naturally come under his notice, and this is called a *circumstantial* description. When the objects are many and various, he introduces those only which combine to produce a great general effect; and this we name a *pictu-resque* description. When the objects stand to each other in the relation of cause and effect, then, of course, they are put into the form of a *narrative*. And sometimes in one short passage he uses two of these methods together, and sometimes all the three.\*

\* See Chap. I., on Method.

## EXERCISES.

1. Write in your own words, and in a concise and interesting form, the plot of any one of the following works :—*Macbeth*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Coriolanus*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Richard II.*, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and the *Lady of the Lake*.

2. Analyze any one of the above plots, finding out the main incidents, and writing them down so as to show that they form one chain of events connecting the beginning of the story with the end.

## ABANDONMENT.

Not only does a writer of genius take a comprehensive view of the whole of a subject, but he also sees intensely each particular part. He is the true seer. He conjures up before him any subject with all its accessories, and then he abandons himself to its influence. Shutting out the present and the palpable, it encloses him—absorbs him. He becomes, as the poets say, possessed, rapt, carried away by it. It envelops him like an atmosphere, and accompanies him wherever he goes. It permeates his whole nature, and stirs every faculty into activity. And in the end he discovers, that the only way to get rid of it is to describe it in clear and accurate language. Thus it happens that it is the subject that influences the author, and not the author the subject. "Poetry," says Professor

Ferrier, "produces the poet." "What is best in any work of art," asks Emerson, "but that part which the work itself seems to require and do?" In fact, the greatest works of authors may be said at the same time to be the works of Nature; and they spring up and grow in obedience to natural laws, and often very much to the astonishment of the mind in which they arise.

That this literary abandonment is common to great writers could be shown by many instances from biography. We shall only cite two. Hobbes tells us that he was always engrossed with some philosophical subject, which kept possession of him for days and weeks at a time. It went with him wherever he went. If he voyaged by sea it was his fellow-passenger. If he journeyed on horseback it mounted in front of him. It was visibly before him when he was awake; and it haunted his dreams while he was asleep. He used to carry a pen and ink-horn in his walking-stick; and whenever a new thought occurred to him, whether by the wayside or the market-place, he stood still, took out his writing materials, and jotted it down. In the life of Cowper there is a somewhat similar instance. One evening when he was in a melancholy mood, his friend, Lady Austen, to amuse him, told him the story of John Gilpin. He laughed immoderately; and the image of that grave and worthy citizen, carried off and brought back again by a horse, could not be got out of his mind. The

only remedy was to describe the adventure in verse. Therefore, through the whole of that night, while the rest of the village of Olney was asleep, and the church clock at intervals was chiming the hours, the poet in imagination was careering with that wild horseman through merry Islington and Edmonton on to Ware, and back again through open toll-bars and excited crowds towards London :—

“ And now the turnpike gates again

Flew open in short space :

The toll-men thinking, as before,

That Gilpin rode a race.

And so he did, and won it too ;

For he got first to town,

Nor stopped, till where he had got up,

He did again get down.”

We find this abandonment also in certain novelists. Of this class, Defoe and Swift are the most notable members. They lose themselves entirely in their heroes. They speak in the first person, and look like witnesses who have been charged upon oath to confess “the whole truth and nothing but the truth.” There is no aiming at effect. They use the simplest words, they mention events just as they happened, and they are careful not to omit the most trifling circumstance. They are, in fact, for the time being Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver.

There are likewise some great dramatists who can forget themselves in their characters. Of these

Shakespeare is by far the most illustrious example. He has created many persons, he has made them express their opinions about almost every subject, yet he has never shown anything about himself. We could not gather from his works any intimation regarding his politics, religion, or sentiments in general. At the beginning of a drama, we could almost fancy, he parted his very soul among the different characters. Thus endowed with life and personality, they became complete individuals, and were allowed to act and speak in the manner best suited to themselves. Then when the play was ended, he recalled his spirit, and became himself again.

In the present day there is a great historian who is characterized above all his fellows by this self-forgetfulness. That historian is Thomas Carlyle, and the work in which he uses this art with the greatest effect is his *French Revolution*. When he began this history, he lost himself, we can fancy, in his engrossing subject. The familiar objects of his quiet study faded from his view, the Paris of 1789 appeared before him, and he felt himself in the very vortex of the great social whirlpool. The tattered and begrimed ruffians of the Revolution, the agony-stricken faces of the victims that were writhing in their clutches, the glare of the conflagrations, the furious clanging of bells, the boom of the cannon, the endless surgings to and fro, the universal turmoil and uproar, were all present to

his senses. Therefore, when he describes these scenes, he forgets that he is in England in the nineteenth century, and imagines that he is in France in the eighteenth century. He forgets that he is the historian, and imagines that he is one of the mob. He speaks in the present tense, and at intervals shouts out directions to the chief actors, just as if the events were actually happening at that moment before his very eyes. Listen to an extract from his account of the storming of the Bastille:—

“Smite thou Louis Tournay, cartwright of the Marais, old soldier of the Regiment Dauphiné; smite at that outer drawbridge chain though the fiery hail whistle round thee. Never over nave or fellow did thy axe strike such a stroke. Down with it, man; down with it to Orcus; let the whole accursed edifice sink thither, and tyranny be swallowed up for ever.”\*

#### EXERCISES.

1. Criticise the following passage, bringing out clearly the thorough abandonment of the author, the suitable-

\* An instance of the interest that mere abandonment can give is seen in Pepys's Diary: “June 15th, 1664. At home to look after things for dinner. And anon at noon comes Mr Creed by chance, and by-and-by the three young ladies: and very merry we were with our pasty very well baked; and a good dish of roasted chickens; pease, lobsters, strawberries. And after dinner to cards, and about five o'clock by water down to Greenwich; and up to the top of the hill, and there played upon the ground at cards. And so to the cherry-garden, and then by water, singing finely, to the Bridge, and there landed.”



ness of the style to the meaning, and any other beauties of thought or expression :—

“The coach was none of your steady-going, yokel coaches, but a swaggering, dissipated London coach; up all night and lying by all day, and leading a dreadful life. It cared no more for Salisbury than if it had been a hamlet. It rattled noisily through the best streets, defied the Cathedral, took the worst corners sharpest, went cutting in everywhere, making everything get out of its way; and spun along the open country-road, blowing a lively defiance out of its key-bugle, as its last glad parting legacy.

“It was a charming evening. Mild and bright. And even with the weight upon his mind which arose out of the immensity and uncertainty of London, Tom could not resist the captivating sense of rapid motion through the pleasant air. The four grays skimmed along, as if they liked it quite as well as Tom did; the bugle was in as high spirits as the grays; the coachman chimed in sometimes with his voice; the wheels hummed cheerfully in unison; the brass-work on the harness was an orchestra of little bells; and thus, as they went clinking, jingling, rattling smoothly on, the whole concern, from the buckles of the leaders’ coupling-reins to the handle of the hind-boot, was one great instrument of music.

“Yoho! past hedges, gates, and trees; past cottages, and barns, and people going home from their work. Yoho! past donkey-chaises, drawn aside into the ditch, and empty carts with rampant horses, whipped up at a bound upon the little water-course and held by struggling carters close to the five-barred gate, until the coach had passed the narrow turning on the road.

Yoho! by churches dropped down by themselves in quiet nooks, with rustic burial-grounds about them, where graves are green, and daisies sleep—for it is evening—on the bosoms of the dead. Yoho! past streams, in which the cattle cool their feet, and where the rushes grow; past paddock-fences, farms, and rick-yards; past last year's stacks cut, slice by slice away, and showing in the waning light like ruined gables, old and brown. Yoho! down the pebbly dip, and through the muddy water-splash, and up at a canter to the level road again. Yoho! Yoho!"

2. Write a critique in the same way on any of the following pieces:—the Battle of Bannockburn, in the *Lord of the Isles*; the Battle of Flodden, in *Marmion*; Tennyson's *Charge of the Light Brigade*.

3. Expand into an animated description the following notes of a famous passage in Chalmers's *Astronomical Discourses*:—

Compared with immensity, the earth a mere speck—if annihilated would no more be missed in the universe than a single leaf in a forest—elements exist which could destroy it—internal fire—noxious air within—a comet might cross our orbit—terrible consequences of each of these.

4. Expand in the same way the following notes of Macaulay's description of the victory of the Highlanders at Killiecrankie:—

Dundee gave the word—Highlanders dropped plaids—off with socks—barefoot—advanced firing—then flung away firelocks—drew broadswords—on with a yell—Lowlanders had no time to fire—Balfour's regiment

broke—Ramsay's men fled—Mackay's own infantry swept away—cavalry galloped off—all over—pursuit down the valley—its appearance in the distance.

#### GRAPHIC EXPRESSION.

It seems to me, if an author has got clear, well-arranged, and vivid thoughts, that he cannot fail to find words to suit them. If an idea is real, if it is not a mere vague notion formed of vapour, if, in other words, it is part of a living mind, it will be living too. And being instinct with life, it will be strong and active, and will take no rest until it clothe itself in words. It will spring from the brain in full panoply, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. In the *Pilgrim's Progress* of Bunyan, we have a strong corroboration of this statement. To all appearance there could be no one less likely to become an author than the poor tinker lying in Bedford Jail. He could scarcely write his name, and he knew nothing whatever of the art of composition. Almost the only books he had ever read were the Bible and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. At the same time his situation was most unfavourable for study, for his vision was bounded on every side by the dingy walls of his cell. Yet the image of that wonderful pilgrimage arose before him like a vision; and thenceforth that dismal dungeon was transformed into a temple of wonders, and he himself into an inspired seer. The forms of the

pilgrims, the scenery of the way, and the sights terrible and strange, stood out so vividly before him, that he felt himself compelled to describe them. He thought not for a moment about words. The living ideas in his mind stirred his faculty of expression into glorious activity, and the language came forth, familiar yet graphic, simple yet often nobly grand. As an instance let us take the following short paragraph, and we shall see that there is not a single word which could be left out or changed with advantage:—

“Now just as the gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them, and behold the city shone like the sun, the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many men with crowns upon their heads, palms in their hands, and golden harps to sing praises withal! There were also of them that had wings; and they answered one another without intermission, saying ‘Holy, holy is the Lord.’ And after that, they shut up the gates, which when I had seen, I wished myself among them.”

Another instance may be given. Richard Baxter is describing in verse his own earnestness as a preacher. He is no poet, and has no command of poetical phrases; but the mere greatness of the fact glorifies the commonplace language, and exalts it to the very height of sublimity:—

“I preached, as never sure to preach again,  
And as a dying man to dying men.”\*

\* Quoted in De Quincey's *Opium-Eater*.

While all the language of eminent writers is expressive, there are certain words that are specially graphic. These words we may call *magical* words: for just as a conjurer with one magical stroke can perform what another man could not do with many, so a great author with one of these words can describe an object which another author could not describe in many pages. The word is uttered; and lo! the scene stands before the reader! While we would compare ordinary language to a cloudy firmament transmitting only suffused light, we would liken a magical word to a rift in the clouds, letting down upon the dim distant landscape a shaft of rays, which discovers some picturesque scene—some little town sleeping under its veil of smoke, or a farm-house gleaming on the lonely hillside, or a bright green pasture set in a frame of dark green trees. Endless examples of these magical words might be quoted; but we have only space for a few.

Shakespeare, in *Macbeth*, calls the swallow "that guest of summer," and to an imaginative mind the phrase is full of meaning. It represents summer as a glorious feast-day, and the swallow as a beautiful stranger invited from afar.

In his *Sketch-Book*, Washington Irving describes the orchestra in a village church; and amongst others he sketches the tailor—"a pale fellow, with a retreating forehead and chin, who played on the clarionet, and seemed to have blown his face to a

point." The phrase "blown his face to a point" is a complete word-picture; and we see the peculiar outline of the musician as distinctly as if it had been traced by a pencil.

One of the best instances of this kind is Burns's representation of a cowardly soldier:—

" His gun's a burthen on his shoulther,  
He downa bide the stink o' pouther;  
His bauldest thocht's a hankering swither  
To stan' or rin;  
Till—skelp—a shot—he's aff a' throuither,  
To save his skin."

These last two lines are a full and detailed description of a rout, or, as the Americans call it, a "stampede." We hear the terror-striking noise—"skelp;" we have a distinct comprehension of the danger—"a shot;" we see a vision of the precipitate fugitive, with legs, arms, and head all trying which will be first out of reach, all mixed up together—"a' throuither;" and last of all, we have his miserable motive—not to save his life, but, "to save his skin."

Some infatuated students are tremulously anxious to acquire what they call *a style*. They get hold of certain books on rhetoric, and peruse carefully the account of the different beauties of language. Very likely, too, a favourite author is studied, and his most glaring peculiarities are caught. They devote, in fact, the most of their attention to the

diction, never taking into account that all the graces of the diction depend upon the ideas. Accordingly, when they begin to write, they land themselves in the most absurd mistakes. At one place, they strain at being clear, and their clearness becomes diffuseness. At another place, they refine away at their expressions in order to make them elegant, and instead of elegance they produce mere silliness. On another occasion, they pant after energy; and, lo! their epithets swell into bombast. Very different is the method of a great author. He does not perplex himself about the formation of a style. His great aim is to take care that his ideas are thoroughly definite and clear, that he has made them entirely his own, or, in other words, that they have become part of his own mind. And when they have become part of his own mind, he knows that they are living and strong, and that they will assume the expression that is most suitable. "When a man's thoughts," says Swift, "are clear, the properest words will generally offer themselves first, and his own judgment will direct him in what order to place them, so as they may be best understood."\* There may be occasional defects in his sentences, which his knowledge of the rules of composition will enable him to remedy. But, on the whole, his style, being natural, is free from those blemishes which spring from affectation, and is clear, strong, or elegant just as occa-

\* Letter to a Young Clergyman.

sion requires. Above all, it is, just as it ought to be, a transcript of the author's own character. "Every man," says Lessing, "has his own style, just as every man has his own nose;" and Carlyle declares, that no man can change his style any more than he can change his skin.

## EXERCISES.

1. Write a critique of the following passage—namely, the encounter between the Redcross Knight and the Saracen—giving, in the first place, in your own language, the picture which is called up before you, and, in the second place, pointing out the graphic words and phrases, and showing how vividly they represent the meaning :—

"A shrilling trumpet sownded from on hye,  
And unto battaill bad themselves addresse;  
Their shining shields about their wrestes they tye,  
And burning blades about their heades doe blesse,  
The instruments of wrath and heavinesse:  
With greedy force each other doth assayle,  
And strike so fiercely, that they do impresse  
Deepe dinted furrowes in the battred mayle:  
The yron walles to ward their blows are weak and  
fraile.

The Sarazin was stout, and wondrous strong,  
And heaped blowes like yron hammers great,  
For after bloud and vengeance he did long.  
The Knight was fiers and full of youthly heat,  
And doubled strokes, like dreaded thunders threat;  
For all for praise and honour he did fight.



Both stricken strike, and beaten both do beat,  
That from their shields forth flyeth fire light,  
And helmets hewen deep shew marks of either's might.

So the one for wrong, the other strives for right :  
As when a gryphon, seized of his pray,  
A dragon fiers encountreth in his flight,  
Through widest ayre making his ydle way,  
That would his rightfull ravine rend away;  
With hideous horror both together smight,  
And souce so sore that they the heavens affray ;  
The wise soothsayer, seeing so sad sight,  
The amazed vulgar tels of warres and mortall fight.

So the one for wrong, the other strives for right ;  
And each to deadly shame would drive his foe.  
The cruell steele so greedily doth bight  
In tender flesh, that streames of bloud down flow ;  
With which the armes that earst so bright did show,  
Into a pure vermillion now are dyde ;  
Great ruth in all the gazers' hearts did grow,  
Seeing the gored woundes to gape so wyde,  
That victory they dare not wish to either side."

2. Criticise, in the same way, one or other of the following passages : Pope's well-known lines, beginning " 'Tis education forms the common man ; " the *Calm*, in Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* ; the *Aerial Concert*, in the same piece ; Tennyson's *Song of the Brook* ; any part of Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*.

3. The following are the notes of a passage in Carlyle's *Cromwell*. Expand them, using words as graphic as possible :—

End of August 1628—John Felton—from Suffolk—retired lieutenant—walking on Tower Hill—melancholy—thinking on the ill which the Duke of Buckingham had done to the country—passed a cutler's stall—saw a hunting-knife—bought it—down to Portsmouth—stabbed the Duke—tried—repented—wished his right hand cut off—hanged at Tyburn—body hung in chains at Portsmouth.

4. In Washington Irving's *Bracebridge Hall* there is a sketch of a dreary, rainy Sunday. The following are the chief details, which should be expanded in graphic words, so as to make as depressing a scene as possible :—

I was ill—inn—town of Derby—November—Sunday—listened to church-bells and rain—looked out of window—into stable-yard—all objects affected by the rain—heaps of straw—pool of water—hens and cock under a cart—patient cow near the cart—horse thrusting his head out of stable window—complaining dog tied to a kennel—kitchen-maid crossing and recrossing the yard—noisy ducks round a puddle.

#### FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE.

Although it is quite proper that the figures of speech should stand all classified and named for the use of critics, yet the student of practical composition would gain very little advantage by forcing them into his memory. Even if he survived such an excruciating process, he would find

that the knowledge of their names would not enable him to use them with any greater effect. Consequently, our present purpose is, not to give a complete list and an exhaustive account of the figures of speech, but to show how natural it is that great authors should use them.

It is natural to a man of genius to feel deeply and to think vividly. So intense often are his impressions, that he cannot convey them to the duller souls of his readers by ordinary images. The necessities of his art compel him to transform and modify these images into figures far more vivid, without at the same time changing their identity. In the world of imagery, he is in fact a mighty conjurer, and easily and naturally he performs many magical artifices to fascinate us. He transforms one object into another, he makes all the parts of a complicated image invisible save one, he stretches an idea beyond all bounds, he gives life to inanimate objects, he calls up new scenes to heighten by likeness or contrast, and he makes one object appear in the guise of its opposite. How each of these artifices is performed let me illustrate by example.

Butler, in his *Hudibras*, wishes to call up before us the pulpit of the Puritans. But it could not be represented by the image of an ordinary pulpit, for it was round, and was intended to be thumped by the excited preacher. Therefore, the poet without compunction transforms it into a drum :—

“Pulpit, drum ecclesiastic,  
Was beat with fist instead of a stick.”

This is an instance of the most common of all figures—namely, Metaphor.

That lively genius, Sam Weller, is boots at the White Hart, in London. His calling tempts him to regard the leather on which men walk as the most important part of their belongings. Accordingly, when he is talking about the company at the inn, he conceals all their other features, and represents them as consisting only of nether extremities:—

“‘We want to know,’ said the little man (Mr Perker), solemnly, ‘and we ask the question of you in order that we may not waken apprehensions inside,—we want to know who you have got in this house at present?’

“‘Who there is in the house?’ said Sam. . . .  
‘There’s a wooden leg in number six; there’s a pair of Hessians in thirteen; there’s two pair of halves in the commercial; there’s these here painted tops in the snuggery, inside the bar; and five more tops in the coffee-room.’”

Here Mr Weller was using the figure Synecdoche.

In *Henry IV*. Shakespeare is contemplating the sublime spectacle of a storm at sea. The poetic enthusiasm which it excites is so overwhelming that he is hurried into the most exaggerated expressions. He represents the winds as catching

up the waves, hanging them in the clouds, and raising such a deafening clamour that the very dead are awakened :—

“ The winds,  
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,  
Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them  
With deafening clamours in the slippery clouds,  
That with the hurly death itself awakes.”

In this passage we see a most masterly use of Hyperbole.

It is the property of genius to give to objects not only life but personality. Tennyson, therefore, in his *Amphion*, represents the trees not only as objects starting into motion under the magic music of the bard, but as distinct persons, each with his own characteristic movement. The oak is a gouty old gentleman, who can only flounder. The ash-trees and beeches are foolish young people, who pirouette and coquette with each other. The linden is a stately matron. The poplars are too tall, and the cypresses too gloomy to dance, and therefore they promenade ; and the pollard willows—shocking vulgar creatures, with their hair all in disorder !—caper by themselves :—

“ ’Tis said he had a tuneful tongue,  
Such happy intonation,  
Wherever he sat down and sung  
He left a small plantation ;  
Wherever in a lonely grove,  
He set up his forlorn pipes

The gouty oak began to move,  
And flounder into hornpipes.

The mountain stirred its bushy crown,  
And, as tradition teaches,  
Young ashes pirouetted down,  
Coquetting with young beeches.  
And briony-vine and ivy-wreath  
Ran forward to his rhyming;  
And from the valleys underneath  
Came little copses climbing.

The linden broke her ranks, and rent  
The woodbine wreaths that bind her,  
And down the middle, buzz! she went,  
With all her bees behind her.  
The poplars, in long order due,  
With cypress promenaded;  
The shockhead willows, two and two,  
By rivers gallopaded."

This spirited passage is a remarkably happy instance of Personification.

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes how tall and invincible Satan appeared when he was detected in the garden of Eden by the angels; and, to heighten our impression of tallness and invincibility, he calls up before us the images of two lofty mountains, Atlas and Teneriffe, touching the very heavens. Satan, he says—

"Collecting all his might, dilated stood,  
Like Teneriffe or Atlas, unremoved,

His stature reached the sky, and on his crest  
Sat Horror plumed."

This is a noble specimen of Simile.

Every one knows that a black object appears still blacker when seen in a white ground, and that a shadow seems darker when sleeping beside a bright gleam of sunshine. Mr Dickens avails himself of this principle in a striking passage in his *Uncommercial Traveller*. He tells us that a poor solitary old man, coming home to his chambers on Christmas Eve, fell down in a fit and cut his head deeply, and after recovering partially and stumbling about among the furniture, dropped down dead; and he makes this sad picture all the more melancholy by setting beside it a sketch of a merry party of young people met at that very time in the room above. He

—— "partly recovered and groped about in the dark to find the door. When he was afterwards discovered, dead, it was clearly established by the marks of his hands about the room that he must have done so. Now this chanced on the night of Christmas Eve, and over him lived a young fellow who had sisters and young country friends, and who gave them a little party that night, in the course of which they played at Blindman's Buff. They played that game for their greater sport by the light of the fire only; and once when they were all quietly rustling and stumbling about, . . . somebody cried, 'Hark! the man below must be playing Blindman's Buff by himself to-night!' They all lis-

tened, and they heard sounds of some one falling about and stumbling against furniture, and they all laughed at the conceit, and went on with their play, more light-hearted and merry than ever. Thus those two so different games of life and death were played out together, blindfolded, in the two sets of chambers."

In this passage we see an instance of that figure of speech called Contrast.

There is still another figure which we must illustrate, namely, Irony. Thackeray, in his *Snob Papers*, wishes to impress us with an idea of the frivolous disposition of George IV., and to make the royal frivolities all the more contemptible, he dresses them in the garb of accomplishments. He tells us that this magnificent monarch, whom his admiring courtiers called "the first gentleman in Europe," and whom the staid, serious, and severely virtuous Scottish nation received with enthusiastic applause, had most illustrious accomplishments. He could cut out a coat. He could play on the fiddle. He could drive a coach almost as well as the Brighton coachman. And, above all, when he was in the full prime and vigour of his genius, he invented a shoe-buckle.

#### EXERCISES.

1. Point out the figures of speech in the following passage, and explain the excellence of any that you think particularly forcible :—



*Ant.* "Mark you this, Bassanio,

The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.

An evil soul producing holy witness

Is like a villain with a smiling cheek ;

A goodly apple rotten at the heart ;

O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath !

*Shy.* Three thousand ducats,—'tis a good round sum.

Three months from twelve, then let me see the  
rate.

*Ant.* Well, Shylock, shall we be beholding to you ?

*Shy.* Signior Antonio, many a time and oft

In the Rialto you have rated me

About my moneys, and my usances :

Still have I borne it with a patient shrug ;

For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe :

You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,

And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine,

And all for use of that which is mine own.

Well, then, it now appears you need my help ;

Go to then ; you come to me, and you say,

'Shylock, we would have moneys ;' you say so ;

You, that did void your rheum upon my beard,

And foot me, as you spurn a stranger cur

Over your threshold ; moneys is your suit.

What should I say to you ? Should I not say,

'Hath a dog money ? is it possible

A cur can lend three thousand ducats ?' or

Shall I bend low, and in a bondman's key,

With bated breath, and whispering humbleness,

Say this,—

'Fair Sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last ;

You spurned me such a day ; another time

You called me dog ; and for these courtesies  
I'll lend you thus much moneys?'"

2. Select and write out specimens of the different figures from any favourite poet.

3. Describe a stupid untrained speaker rising to address a public meeting, feeling at first very much at a loss, but soon falling into a sea of commonplaces, and being carried triumphantly to the end. Heighten the description by using a simile, and then compare it with the passage in Carlyle's Essay on *Count Cagliostro*.

4. Write a detailed sketch, likening man through his whole existence to a child, and his life to a pastime, and describing the different toys which amuse him at the different stages, and then compare the sketch with Pope's striking lines in the *Essay on Man*.

#### THE POWER OF MAKING COMMON THINGS INTERESTING.

To a man of genius no natural object is contemptible. It has been made by God, and is therefore wonderful: it has some relation to man, and therefore is invested with interesting associations. A great author can, therefore, take up the humblest subject and make it significant. Like Wordsworth,—

"Of common things that round us lie,  
He can a random truth impart."

And like Goldsmith, "he touches nothing which he does not adorn."

There are several literary devices by which an author can make a mean subject interesting.

The chief of these undoubtedly is humour. "Humour," says Carlyle, "is properly the exponent of low things." It is that joyous sympathy issuing from a healthy heart, which leads us to descend to the level of the humblest objects and make kindly sport with them. A notable example of this is Robert Browning's *Pied Piper*. In this paper the author describes how the town of Hamelin was overrun with rats, and how these pests were destroyed. Now, at first sight, rats seem to be disgustingly prosaic animals. But let us see how the poet invests them with interest, and what impudent, clamouring, omnivorous, shrilly-discordant creatures he makes them:—

"Rats!

They fought the dogs, and killed the cats,  
And bit the babies in the cradles,  
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,  
And licked the soup from the cook's own ladles,  
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,  
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,  
And even spoiled the women's chats,  
By drowning their speaking  
With shrieking and squeaking  
In fifty different sharps and flats."

A weird piper comes, and with his magical music draws the rats out of their holes, and leads

them into the river, where they are drowned. In the description of this event we make a wonderful discovery. We find that rats are very much like ourselves, being of different sizes, having different complexions, and standing in different domestic relations—nay, one individual (the only one who managed to escape from the river) is a poet, and gives us a glowing picture of a rat's paradise:—

“ At the first shrill notes of the pipe,  
I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,  
And putting apples, wondrous ripe,  
Into a cider-press's gripe :  
And a moving away of pickle-tub boards,  
And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,  
And a drawing the corks of train-oil flasks,  
And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks :  
And it seemed as if a voice  
(Sweeter far than by harp or psaltery  
Is breathed) called out, ‘ Oh rats, rejoice !  
The world is grown to one vast drysaltery ;  
So, munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,  
Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon.’  
And just as a bulky sugar puncheon,  
All ready staved, like a great sun shone,  
Glorious, scarce an inch before me,  
Just as methought it said, ‘ Come, bore me,’  
——I found the Weser rolling o'er me.”

## EXERCISES.

1. Criticise the following extract from the *Vicar of Wakefield*, pointing out the arts by which Goldsmith

manages to make such commonplace circumstances interesting :—

“ My wife and daughters happening to return a visit at neighbour Flamborough’s, found that family had lately got their pictures done by a limner, who travelled the country, and took likenesses for fifteen shillings a head. As this family and ours had long a sort of rivalry in point of taste, our spirit took the alarm at this stolen march upon us, and, notwithstanding all I could say, and I said much, it was resolved that we should have our pictures done too. Having, therefore, engaged the limner (for what could I do?), our next deliberation was to show the superiority of our taste in the attitudes. As for our neighbour’s family, there were seven of them, and they were drawn with seven oranges,—a thing quite out of taste, no variety of life, no composition in the world. We desired to have something in a brighter style, and, after many debates, at length came to a unanimous resolution of being drawn together in one large historical family-piece. This would be cheaper, since one frame would serve for all; and it would be infinitely more genteel, for all families of any taste were now drawn in the same manner. As we did not immediately recollect an historical subject to hit us, we were contented each with being drawn as independent historical figures. My wife desired to be represented as Venus, and the painter was requested not to be too frugal of his diamonds in her stomacher and hair. Her two little ones were to be as Cupids by her side; while I, in my gown and band, was to present her with my books on the Whistonian Controversy. Olivia would be drawn as an Amazon, sitting upon a

bank of flowers, dressed in a green joseph, richly laced with gold, and a whip in her hand. Sophia was to be a shepherdess, with as many sheep as the painter could put in for nothing; and Moses was to be dressed out with a hat and white feather.

"Our taste so much pleased the squire, that he insisted on being put in as one of the family—in the character of Alexander the Great—at Olivia's feet. This was considered by us all as an indication of his desire to be introduced into the family, nor could we refuse his request. The painter was therefore set to work, and, as he wrought with assiduity and expedition, in less than four days the whole was completed. The piece was large, and it must be owned he did not spare his colours—for which my wife gave him great encomiums. We were all perfectly satisfied with his performance; but an unfortunate circumstance, which had not occurred till the picture was finished, now struck us with dismay. It was so very large that we had no place in the house to fix it. How we all came to disregard so material a point is inconceivable; but certain it is we had all been greatly remiss. This picture, therefore, instead of gratifying our vanity as we hoped, leaned in a most mortifying manner against the kitchen wall, where the canvass was stretched and painted, much too large to be got through any of the doors, and the jest of all our neighbours."

2. Write a critique of one or other of the following works, showing the arts by which the poet renders it beautiful and interesting: Tennyson's *Walking to the Mail*, Wordsworth's *We are Seven*, Cowper's *Dog and Water-Lily*, Pope's *Town Mouse and Country Mouse*.

3. Dickens, in his *Martin Chuzzlewit*, has an ingenious and humorous description of the wind, on an autumn evening, in a Wiltshire village. The following are the notes, and they should be expanded into a lively and interesting sketch :—

The wind playing all sorts of whimsical and complicated pranks—prowling round the blacksmith's forge—swinging the sign-post of the Blue Dragon—scattering the withered leaves—into what sort of holes and corners it followed them—rushing into the open door of Pecksniff's house—blowing out the candle in Miss Pecksniff's hand—knocking down Mr Pecksniff—then off across the country and out to sea—what it did there.

4. The following are the notes of an incident which befel Robinson Crusoe after he had been several years alone on his desert island. Expand them, and compare the sketch with the original :—

One day about noon—going to my boat—man's naked foot in the sand—thunderstruck—my feelings—what I did to solve the mystery—home to my fortification—how I showed my terror by the way—what I could not remember when I got into my fortress.

THE END.

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